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FAITH, FANCIES AND FETICH

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IBEJI, THE TWIN-GODS.

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FAITH, FANCIES AND FETICH

OR YORUBA PAGANISM

Being some account of the Religious Beliefs of the West African Negroes, particularly of the Yoruba Tribes of Southern Nigeria

BY

STEPHEN S. FARROW

B.D. (DUR.), PH.D. (EDIN.)

WITH A FOREWORD

BY

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READER IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

LONDON

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

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PREFACE

IN presenting this outline of West African Paganism, the author ventures to hope that it may prove to be of some interest to students of primitive religions, whether working in the scientific study of the History of Religion, or in the practical task of seeking to turn our human brethren of other lands "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." A sympathetic study of the beliefs of those to whom he goes to minister is, in the writer's opinion, a primary duty of the Christian missionary and proves to be of the greatest value in that most responsible and blessed work—dealing with human souls. In compiling this work he has relied mainly on his personal investigations during his missionary career, but has used the writings of others for the purpose of illustration and amplification.

Permission to use five of the photographs of the late Rev. J. T. F. Halligey has been graciously given by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, and to reproduce the illustration of Oro-worship, from a photograph by one of the author's fellow-missionaries, by the Church Missionary Society. The others are copies of his own photographs and of curios in his own possession.

Special thanks are due to the Editor of the *Nigerian Chronicle*, and to the Rev. E. T. Johnson, of Lagos, for permission to use the articles contributed by the latter gentleman to the said periodical, and particularly to reproduce in full the translation of the *Odu Ofunsa*.

620635

Certain slight modifications of the thesis, by way of minor omissions and additions, have been made to adapt it for publication; but the published work is substantially the same as in the copy submitted to the University of Edinburgh and lodged in its library.

Quoted passages from other writers, whether in books or periodicals, are given exactly as found, without emendation.

Edinburgh,
July, 1926.

FOREWORD

HAVING been invited by the University of Edinburgh to express a judgment on the scientific value of Dr. Farrow's work, I was glad to meet with a study of West African religion that, while frankly adopting the standpoint of a Christian missionary, yet manifestly strove to do full and impartial justice to the facts. Of course, in every inquiry we must start from certain presuppositions, which in a sense are prejudices. For instance, in considering religious history on its ethical side, one could hardly avoid treating human sacrifice as a symptom of low development; and to say "low" is to apply a standard of valuation. The anthropologist tries to escape from subjective bias by provisionally adopting one version or another of what is known as the theory of human evolution. This means, or might mean, little more than that he is prepared, with Gibbon, to "acquiesce in the pleasing conclusion that every age of the world has increased, and still increases, the real wealth, the happiness, the knowledge, and perhaps the virtue, of the human race." On such a view high would simply stand for advanced and low for backward. But Dr. Farrow sometimes says, instead of low, "degraded"; and, taken strictly, this term would imply that there has been actual backsliding—a "falling away from grace." This is quite a reasonable assumption so long as it is

treated as such ; and, if we proceed to verify it by further research, I have no doubt that in the medley of Yoruba beliefs many elements will be found to have "come down in the world" in the course of their history. Especially interesting is the question whether Olorun, the Supreme Deity, who at present is reverenced but scarcely worshipped, is the relic of a purer faith—a fair tree that has become choked by an undergrowth of animistic superstitions. Dr. Farrow, I think, has disposed of the all-too-facile explanations of earlier investigators ; and, to make good his own contention, I expect that the next step must be to collect and compare the similar evidence from the rest of West Africa. Captain Rattray, for example, has recently shown that Nyame, the Supreme Being of Ashanti, once supposed to be "otiose," has temples and a regular worship. For the rest, I hope that Dr. Farrow, and other students who may be led to follow in his footsteps, will do their best to discover how far the natives themselves recognise gradations of status as between the very various orders of beings or powers to which a sacred character is attributed. Such a scale of religious values exists, I believe, in their minds or as it were at the back of their minds ; and may it not be that herein we have ready to hand the best clue through the maze of their faiths and fancies to that central need and conviction which their old religion satisfied after some fashion, and any new religion must satisfy even more fully if it is to succeed ?

R. R. MARETT.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Introductory	1
II.	Objects of Worship	12
III.	Objects of Belief—The Supreme Deity ...	23
IV.	„ „ The Orishas	34
V.	„ „ The Orishas (*continued*) ...	60
VI.	„ „ The Spirits of the Dead...	68
VII.	„ „ The Devil	85
VIII.	Modes of Worship	92
IX.	The World of the Mysterious	116
X.	The Soul of Man and its Destiny	130
XI.	The End in View	138
XII.	The Warrant, Object and Method of Christian Missions	145
XIII.	Concluding Remarks	151

APPENDICES

A.	An Ancient Yoruba Religious Hymn	161
B.	Excursus—The Origin of the Yoruba Tribes ...	166
C.	Yoruba Christian Lyrics	169
	Index	176

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

		PAGE
IBEJI, THE TWIN-GODS	*Frontispiece*	
THE MOSQUE AT KEMTA, ABEOKUTA	*facing*	4
THE ROCK OLUMỌ, ABEOKUTA	,,	14
A SILK-COTTON TREE BY THE RIVER OGUN ...	,,	14
A SHRINE OF THE GODDESS YEMAJA	,,	46
THE SACRED AXE OF SHANGO		49
ROCKS NEAR ABEOKUTA	*facing*	52
A SHRINE DEDICATED TO OGUN, THE GOD OF WAR	,,	52
IMAGE OF ṢỌPỌNỌ, GOD OF SMALL-POX		57
A MANGROVE SWAMP	*facing*	64
ORO WORSHIP	,,	64
CHIEF'S STAFF, SHOWING BIRD OF OSÀNYIN		66
VICTIMS OF ORO	*facing*	72
EGUNS IN ABEOKUTA	,,	76
ADAMU-ORISHA	,,	80
SHRINE OF ESHU, THE DEVIL	,,	80
A COMMON MUD IMAGE OF ESHU		87
IMAGE OF ESHU (*a*)		88
ANOTHER IMAGE OF ESHU (*b*)		89 and 90
ARTICLES USED IN IDOL-WORSHIP		93
MISSIONARIES' CANOES ON THE RIVER OGUN ...	*facing*	94
A FOREST PATH	,,	104
A WAYSIDE SHRINE SHOWING THE "MARIWO" ...		118
AMULETS		123
A WOMAN'S AMULET GIRDLE		124

FAITH, FANCIES AND FETICH

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE purpose of this treatise is to give some account of the religious beliefs and practices of the West African negroes, particularly as exhibited by the tribes of the Yoruba country in Southern Nigeria, contributing somewhat to the study of the History of Religion, and also, while recognising the elements of truth already possessed by the said people, justifying the propagation of Christianity among them.

Something has already been done in this particular field, but the chief works have been written by those who were not conversant with the language, and who, with the exception of the late Mr. R. E. Dennett, did not live among the people. These writers had to get their information at second, or third, hand, and their work, praiseworthy as it is for the pains taken in acquiring the same, and valuable for what it has recorded, has suffered considerably from the serious difficulties which beset research of this kind. Dr. E. B. Tylor pointedly says, " Even with much time and care and knowledge of language, it is not always easy to elicit from savages

the details of their theology. They try to hide from the prying and contemptuous foreigner their worship of gods who seem to shrink, like their worshippers, before the white man and his superior Deity." [1] Dr. Andrew Lang well says, "Your testimony is often derived from observers ignorant of the language of the people whom they talk about, or who are themselves influenced by one or other theory, or bias. . . . The savage informants wish to please or to mystify inquirers, or they answer at random, or deliberately conceal their most sacred institutions, or have never paid any attention to the subject." [2] The two sources of error, "the desire to please" and "the desire to mystify," are ever present in the mind of the West African pagan who is being interrogated by the white man. Also the Yoruba language is one of peculiar subtlety. Its most important feature is musical intonation, and a frequent method of deceit is to utter the words of one sentence and to put upon them the tones of another, conveying a totally different meaning, which only a person with an expert knowledge of the language can detect. Lying is so common that when a falsehood is detected, the culprit excuses himself by saying, "Did you not know that I was *talking Yoruba?*"

Dr. R. H. Nassau, writing after forty years' experience in the French Congo, gives us his method,—"Wherever I lived I was always leading the conversation, in hut or in camp, back to a study of native thought. I soon found that I gained nothing, if I put my questions suddenly, or without mask. The natives generally were aware that white men despised them and their beliefs and were slow to admit me to their thought if I made a direct advance." He says also, "Offering in the following pages a founda-

[1] *Primitive Culture*, Vol. I. p. 422.
[2] *The Making of Religion*, p. 45.

tion of African superstitious beliefs and practices, I premise that I have gathered them from a very large number of native witnesses, very few of whom presented to me all the same ideas. Any one else, inquiring of other natives in other places, would not find, as held by every one of them, all that I have recorded, but parts of all these separate ideas will be found held by separate individuals everywhere."[1] The writer's own experience fully coincides with that of this eminent authority, and his own inquiries were often of necessity circumlocutory and indirect. Valuable and reliable information was obtained for him by Mr. (now the Rev.) J. J. Olumide, Mr. E. S. Aiyebiwo, and other native Christian converts, from the devotees of special gods, the said devotees being their own relatives, or otherwise well known to them.

Another difficulty, necessitating caution and judgment in the acceptance of information, is that, in the absence of any written language, the standard of belief concerning various deities and powers varies considerably, even in a comparatively small area. Those cults in which the standard of belief is most carefully guarded are all connected with Secret Societies. These organisations wield enormous power over the whole of West Africa, and are all of a religious, or semi-religious, nature. The initiated alone are allowed to know the doctrine and witness the rites of each, the penalty for revealing which is death. It would not for a moment be tolerated that any white man, or even uninitiated native, should witness, still less photograph, such ceremonies as might at all correspond to the "Churinga," "Intichiuma" and "Initiation Ceremonies" of the Central Australian tribes as described in Messrs. Spencer and Gillen's works.

[1] *Fetichism in West Africa*, p. 35.

Religion is intimately associated with every detail of the life of the West African negro, in its personal, social and political aspects. From birth to burial, and even beyond, his whole personal experience is regulated and controlled by his religion. The system of government is likewise entirely religious. The king is a sacred person. The senate is the *Ogboni* secret society. The executive is *Oro*, the avenging deity, which is represented by another secret society.

There are three great religions found in West Africa generally, viz.: Paganism, mainly of an animistic type, Mohammedanism, and Christianity. The two latter are foreign introductions, and do not come within the scope of this treatise, which deals only with the first, the indigenous belief of the Yoruba tribes, except in so far as to show finally the justification of Christian missionary work among these people.

The two writers who have dealt particularly with the religion of the Yoruba tribes are the late Colonel Ellis, and the late Mr. R. E. Dennett. To each of these praise is due for the labour exercised and the amount of information given, but the work of each has suffered from the causes given above. The earlier writer, Col. Ellis, although he gives many Yoruba words and draws up a comparative table of the *Yoruba*, *Ga*, and *Ewe* languages, was evidently not thoroughly conversant with *Yoruba*. He calls the god of smallpox "Shankpanna," whereas the correct spelling is *Ṣọpọnọ*. There are no closed syllables in the Yoruba language. The only apparent exception is a syllable ending in "n," which is merely a nasal intonation (cf. Fr. *On*).

Again, writing of tree-spirits, Ellis describes the *iroko* as the "silk-cotton tree." No one familiar with the country and its language could have made this mistake.

MOSQUE AT KEMTA, ABEOKUTA.

facing p. 4.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

The *iroko* is the "African oak." The Yoruba name for the silk-cotton tree is *peregun*. Moreover, Ellis gives no authorities for his statements, which are sometimes clearly incorrect, *e.g.* in his *Yoruba-speaking Peoples* he states (on p. 27) that "in January, 1891, there was a great political meeting in Abeokuta, when some European missionaries were expelled." This is untrue, as regards the latter statement. The writer was living in Abeokuta at the time the said meeting was held. Its *raison d'être* was a dispute between the chiefs and the British Government in Lagos. It was suggested by some that the missionaries should be expelled (as all Europeans had been on a similar occasion in 1867); but this suggestion was not adopted. None was expelled.

It is, unfortunately, not possible to exonerate the gallant colonel from a measure of anti-Christian bias, which at times leads him to jump to conclusions which are scientifically untrue, as in his treatment of the Yoruba conception of *Olorun*, the supreme Deity, as shown in a later chapter.[1]

Mr. Dennett was intimately known to the writer, whose wife was first cousin to this gentleman. Mr. Dennett never learned to speak the language, but wrote down Yoruba words as given to him by others; but, as he went openly to priests and keepers of shrines and asked direct questions, this thoroughly British and un-African method of inquiry was very likely, indeed certain, at times to lead to imperfect, and, not seldom, untrue answers. Mr. Dennett's interpretations, deductions and conclusions are often at fault, owing to his poor acquaintance with the language, and also to the very free play he gave

[1] That this expression, "anti-Christian bias," is justified will be seen by reference to pp. 35 and 36 of Ellis' *Ewe-speaking Peoples*, in his remarks on "the Jewish god [*sic*] Jehovah."

to his imagination. This is very prominent in his pamphlet, *My Yoruba Alphabet.*

The writer gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to these two deceased authors and regrets the necessity of these criticisms, which, however, have to be made since they are both quoted as authorities in such eminent works as Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Jevons' *Introduction to the History of Religion*, the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, etc. It has also to be remembered that Dennett and Miss Kingsley alike borrow from Ellis and are influenced to some extent by his ideas.

The writer's personal investigations in the country were made during the years 1889–1894, before the study of the History of Religion had come into its present prominence, and before the country had been taken over by the British Government, which during the last thirty years has put down with strong hand human sacrifice and twin-murder. For many years prior to 1893 there were no Europeans, or Americans, in the interior of the Yoruba country except a handful of missionaries.

The Yoruba Country and its Peoples.—The Yoruba country is that portion of Southern Nigeria which is bounded on the west by the country of Dahomey, on the east by the sixth degree of east longitude, on the north by the high table-land through which flows the river Niger, and on the south by the Bight of Benin.

The population exceeds 3,000,000, and comprises the following tribes: Yoruba proper, Egba, Lagos, Ketu, Ijebu, Ekiti, Ibadan, Ijesha, Ife, and Ondo. The Benin people are also closely allied to the Yoruba tribes, and their language may be regarded as its most remote dialect.

The writer lived for three years among the Egbas in

Abeokuta, and for shorter periods among the Ibadans and in Lagos. He has visited other Yoruba tribes.

There is no authentic history of the Yoruba people until within the last two centuries or so. There are, however, many traditions as to their origin, the majority pointing to their being of foreign extraction, while a few treat them as an indigenous race, taking its rise at Ife, which is still regarded as a place of the greatest sanctity by all the Yoruba tribes. Some of the traditions trace their origin to a great flood which destroyed all the world except one person (or more), a bird and a palm-nut, from which the Yorubas and the rest of the renewed world (human and otherwise) sprang.[1] The bulk of traditional testimony is in favour of their having immigrated from the north-east. There are strongly Semitic traits in their customs and idioms. Their folklore is rich in fables. Their speech is enriched with an abundance of proverbs, most of which show great astuteness and sound wisdom.

The several Yoruba tribes vary considerably in their degrees of civilisation, and show much evidence of degeneration, but they are still the leading people in West Africa, in intelligence, in agriculture, in commerce and in military ability. The West Africa Frontier Force (among the finest of British-trained African troops) is composed almost entirely of Yorubas. They are skilful in the primitive arts, smelting their own ore, making steel tools, growing their own cotton, spinning, dyeing and weaving it into cloth. Chip-carving, poker-work and leather-work are practised by them for decorative purposes.

[1] Dr. Driver is incorrect when he says that "Flood-stories" are "absent in Egypt . . . and almost absent in other parts of Africa, except where they are due to Christian influence" (*Genesis*, 8th edn. pp. 101, 102).

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, all the tribes of the country were united under the king of old Oyo (*i.e.* Katunga), and the Yoruba kingdom was far more powerful than either Dahomey or Ashanti. In the days of Ajagbo there were four main divisions, viz.: Yoruba, Egba, Ketu and Ijebu. The latter part of the said century was occupied by the long, peaceful and prosperous reign of Abiodun, who was succeeded in 1800 by Arogangan, during whose reign began the breaking up into various small tribes, with consequent inter-tribal wars, which were fostered for the purpose of maintaining the slave trade. The great town of Abeokuta was gradually formed in the years from 1825 to 1838, by refugees from slave-raided towns, until definitely founded by Lishabi, who is described as a giant and a demi-god.

The most superior tribes are the Yoruba proper and the Egba, next come the Ibadans and Ijebus, then the Ijeshas and Ondos, and last of all the Binis, or Benin people. These last three have been the most degraded in devil-worship, twin-murder and human sacrifice.

The Yoruba Language.—The language is of a simple agglutinating type. All its syllables are open, the only apparent exception being a nasal sound represented in type by the letter "n." Great use is made of tones. Three tones are recognised, viz. high, middle and low, *e.g.* *fọ́*—"to break," *fọ*—"to speak," *fọ̀*—"to wash." Many Europeans never learn to hear or speak the language with any accuracy, because they ignore this vital characteristic.[1] Three double consonants are used, viz. *ṣ* for "sh," *gb*, a sound which has no English equivalent, and

[1] Dennett, in his *Nigerian Studies*, p. 66, gives seven different meanngs to the word which he prints as "Oko," as though all were pronounced the same. As a matter of fact they are all pronounced differently, being from various roots, and should be given thus: *ȯko, oko, ȯkóbó, okô, ọkọ, ọkọ́, ọ̀kọ̀*; his other words similarly.

p, pronounced as "kp." There is no pure *p* in Yoruba. Special vowels are *ẹ*, pronounced as e in "bet," and *ọ* a short, broad a as in "awe." The other vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, are pronounced according to the "continental" method, "ah," "eh," "ee," "o," "o͞o."

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Note.—Nearly all the works named in B and C above have been allowed to go out of print. Some are to be found in the library of the University of Edinburgh, others in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, and all (including the Yoruba publications and the *Nigerian Chronicle*) in the Reading-room of the British Museum, London.

CHAPTER II

OBJECTS OF WORSHIP

MAN'S communications with the external are through his senses, and the majority of our mental concepts are derived from the sense of sight. "Visual ideas" are formed, which in the religious sphere are generally expressed, especially in the more primitive religions, under visible forms, *e.g.* images, pictures, sacred objects (whether natural, or of human formation), places, etc. The regard, veneration, or worship, paid to these has been called "fetichism," "idolatry," "polytheism," etc., but the worshippers always indignantly repudiate the suggestion that they adore the image, stock, stone, etc., as such, asserting that their worship is given to that spirit, or power, of which the material object is the representation, or the temporary abode. "A South African negro offered food to a tree in the presence of an European traveller. The latter observed that a tree cannot eat. 'Oh,' replied the negro, 'tree not fetich. Fetich spirit, not seen, live in tree.'" [1]

To get at the belief of such people as the Yoruba tribes, we must, then, consider first the objects which represent that belief, and to which (outwardly at least) it is expressed in worship.

Professor D. G. Brinton, of Philadelphia, classifies the Objects of Worship in the following order: the Celestial Bodies, the Four Elements, Stones and Rocks,

[1] Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, Bd. ii. p. 188.

Trees and Plants, Places and Sites, the Lower Animals, Man, Life and its Transmissions. This classification is necessarily materialistic, dealing with the external things of religion, but we will follow its order and consider later the Spiritual Beings which are represented by and worshipped through these.

The Celestial Bodies.—There is among the Yorubas no existing worship of the sun, moon or stars, but traces of such in the past may be found. *Orun* (the sun) and *Oshu* (the moon) seem to have been deified, but sacrifices are no longer made to them. The appearance of the new moon, however, is observed as a festival, particularly when the new yams are in season.

The Four Elements.—Neither earth, air, fire nor water is sacred in itself. The worship of the wind is, however, found in *Oye*, the goddess of the Harmattan, a dry sirocco wind which blows from the north, at a certain season of the year, bringing a very fine dust from the Sahara. She is supposed to reside in a cave to the north of *Ilorin*, or on *Igbeti*, a mountain where *Elegba* (the devil) is said to have his palace. Possibly also in *Olori-Merin*, the four-headed image which is found outside a town, facing the four quarters from whence come the winds, to keep away pestilence and damage by tornado, we have a survival of wind-worship. This figure is really a "fetich" or "juju," not in itself an *orisha*,[1] but representing the four great orishas, *Obatala*, *Odudua*, *Shango* and *Ifa*. Fire-worship may be traced in the cult of *Shango*, his priests claiming the right to act as salvage men (for their own benefit exclusively!) when a house is destroyed by fire. Also when a candidate for the priesthood of *Ifa* (the chief oracle) is initiated, there is the ceremony of *Pinodu*, in which he receives on the open palms of his hands

[1] See p. 34.

(previously dipped in consecrated Ifa water) flaming oil from a new lamp, and rubs the same on his body, without experiencing injury, as a proof that he is secure against the fire of sickness and other "ills that flesh is heir to." In the same initiation there are water-ceremonies for purification, but water-worship is chiefly represented by the deities, *Olokun* the sea-god, *Olosa* the lagoon-goddess, *Oya*, *Oshun*, *Oba*, goddesses of the three rivers bearing the same names, and the great goddess *Yemaja* who presides over the river *Ogun*.

Stones and Rocks.—These, when in any way curious or conspicuous, are liable to become objects of worship. A stone slab resting on a pillar of rock, or even of earth, or a boulder poised aloft, will probably become an object of veneration. At Ife (the traditional cradle of the Yoruba race and religion) there are a few remains of ancient masonry, of which the origin is entirely unknown. These, according to tribal myths, are the remains of certain gods, who took part in the work of creation and then turned to stone. These stones are worshipped. Mr. R. E. Dennett has suggested that they are remains of two churches "made by some black mason, possibly one of those natives sent to the King of Portugal in the fifteenth century, and educated by the Portuguese. He may have returned as a lay brother, or even as a priest, and found his way to Ife." This interesting conjecture has, however, nothing to support it! The stones show no trace of cross, crucifix, or any other Christian symbol, nor is there any record or tradition of any form of Christianity in the Yoruba country proper, before the arrival of the Church Missionary Society's pioneer mission in 1843.[1] With these stones and the myth associated with them may be compared a somewhat similar instance

[1] But see note at end of Chapter III.

THE ROCK OLUMO, ABEOKUTA.

A SILK-COTTON TREE BY THE RIVER OGUN.

facing p. 14.

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described by Messrs. Spencer and Gillen in their work, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*. In the chapter on Initiation Ceremonies they tell of two Mythical men who died on their Churinga, " So they lay down on their Churinga and died and great stones arose to mark the spot." [1] In the Yoruba country great rocks standing in the midst of a plain are likewise deified. A notable instance of this is the *Olumo*, which stands in the centre of Abeokuta, a great town of 200,000 inhabitants, with an encircling wall, fifteen miles in circumference. This great rock contains a spacious cave and other hiding-places where many refugees found a shelter in the days when the export slave trade was at its height, their own towns and villages having been destroyed by the Mohammedan raiders. The name *Olumo* (*Oluwa mo o*) signifies " the Lord built it " and indicates that the place was regarded as a divine gift for their protection, but the rock itself soon became an object of worship and human sacrifices were offered to it. Thus " they worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator." *Oke* is the god of mountains, worshipped by all who live in mountainous or rocky country, because, if neglected, he is credited with sending landslips and avalanches to punish those who have been neglectful of his wants. Falling boulders are always his handiwork, a token that he is requiring an offering. Another possible cause of the worship of these great rocks is the fact that, as the evening gives place to night, a weird singing noise proceeds from them, attributable to " spirits." When new to the country the writer was informed by an older missionary that the sound proceeded from " a lizard

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 346. *Churinga* is the name given by the Australian blacks to a charm supposed to possess great magical power, *e.g.* the " bull-roarer."

dying among the rocks," but he noticed that it only occurred after intense heat, and began two or three hours after sunset, whence he concluded that it was caused by friction as the rocks cooled down; but the animistic pagan is ignorant of the simplest laws of natural science, and attributes all such effects to "spirits." A curious instance of the worship of rock and stone is that which is paid to his stone anvil by the Yoruba blacksmith, as the representative of his god Ogun, the deity of iron and war.

Trees and Plants. — Certain trees are particularly sacred. The silk-cotton tree (Yoruba *peregun*) is highly venerated throughout West Africa "from the Senegal to the Niger," probably because of its majestic appearance, for it is of little utility, the timber being soft, and its cotton possessing neither strength nor durability. This tree often grows to a stupendous height, approximating 300 feet, "far out-topping all other trees of the forest." [1]

With its light-coloured bark covering an enormous trunk, bare for one-third or more of its height, surmounted by a luxurious growth of branches and dark green foliage, it presents a beautiful and imposing appearance. Colonel Ellis tells us that—

> Among the Ewe-speaking peoples of the Slave Coast (who are next-door neighbours of the Yorubas—S. S. F.) the indwelling god of this giant of the forest goes by the name of Huntin. Trees in which he specially dwells—for it is not every silk-cotton tree that he thus honours—are surrounded by a girdle of palm-leaves, and sacrifices of fowls, or occasionally of human beings, are fastened to the trunk or laid at the foot of the tree. A tree distinguished by a girdle of palm-leaves may not be cut down or injured in any way, and even silk-cotton trees which are not supposed to be animated by Huntin may not be felled unless the woodman first offers a sacrifice of fowls and palm-oil to purge himself from the proposed

[1] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, ii. p. 14.

sacrilege. To omit the sacrifice is an offence which may be punished by death.[1]

The Yorubas worship also the African oak (*Iroko*) to which the sacrifice of a white chicken is offered each month. The *Ayan* tree, which has very hard timber, is sacred to *Shango*, the god of lightning, and from it the Shango-axe or club is always made. The African mahogany (*Apa*), the *Akoko* and *Ekika* are also sacred. Some species of palm are sacred, and every sacred grove is guarded by a palm-frond being suspended across its entrance. Shrines are frequently dedicated at the foot of a sacred tree.

Places and Sites.—As might be expected, many such are to be found in the Yoruba country. The most sacred place is the town of *Ife*, some fifty miles to the east of Ibadan. There are various myths as to the origin of the Yoruba people and of mankind generally, several of which begin with the tradition of a deluge. But practically all regard Ife as the birthplace of the race. There is, however, a firmly established tradition among the Yorubas that their ancestors came from a far-off country in the north-east. The following is a typical tradition :

From a far country in the interior were sent fifteen persons, and with them came *Okambi*—a sixteenth—who was presented with a slave, a trumpeter, *Okinkin* by name, a fowl, and a bundle tied up with a black cloth. Their journey brought them to an unknown country, where there was nothing but water. The trumpeter sounded an alarm, the bundle was opened and from it fell some earth and a palm-nut, which fell into the water and from it sprang up at once a tree with sixteen branches. The weary travellers climbed into it and rested until the morning. The trumpeter blew a fresh blast, whereupon the fowl started scratching in the earth and the

[1] *Ewe-speaking Peoples*, p. 49 *seq.*, quoted by Frazer, *G. B.*, ii. p. 14.

water was dried up over a great area. Okambi, Okinkin and the slave Letu came down from the tree; but Okambi would not allow the others to descend until they promised to pay him periodically 200 cowries as tribute. This all took place at Ife, which is therefore regarded as the place of origin of the world and of the Yoruba tribes.

Ife is also credited with being the place of origin of many of the gods, *e.g. Ifa,* the supreme oracle. *Kuso* again is sacred as the site of the deification of Shango. *Lishabi's Rock* is a cliff on the bank of the river *Ogun,* about midway between Lagos and Abeokuta, where Lishabi, a great hunter and warrior and the reputed founder of Abeokuta, is said to have descended into the earth after suffering defeat at the hands of the Dahomians. Canoemen passing the spot often hail "Lishabi, Oh!" in salutation of this demi-god, and when the hail is echoed back by the cliff they say that Lishabi is answering them. The writer has often heard this done.

Groves, which occupy a large place in the worship of the Yorubas, and are sacred sites, are not themselves "objects of worship," although they may contain such. As a rule, admission to them is only granted to the initiated of the particular cult to which each is devoted.

Lower Animals.—Throughout West Africa, from Gambia to the Congo, the leopard is regarded with great veneration, possibly because of its deep cunning, its great strength and its absolute fearlessness; hence the proverb, *Akamo ekun yio ni iyonu, i.e.* "He who blockades a leopard will have trouble," the equivalent of "to beard a lion in his den." When a leopard is killed its face is covered with a cloth, because it is a king, and its pardon is asked. A similar custom has been found in some parts of Russia when a bear is slain. The *Alafin* of *Oyo,* who is the paramount king of the Yoruba tribes, is called

" the Leopard," and is himself regarded as divine. One of the most powerful and the most dreaded of the secret societies of West Africa is the Leopard Society, which has its stronghold in the hinterland of Sierra Leone and the Sherbro country. Its members, called " human leopards," wore leopard skins, with sharp steel claws in the pads, wherewith they inflicted ghastly and fatal wounds on their human victims. The *patas*, or red monkey (Yoruba *Ijimere*), is worshipped as being itself an orisha ; but not all species of monkey are sacred. The writer possessed one of this kind as a pet, which was sometimes reverently saluted by heathen people as *Oluwa mi, i.e.* " My lord."

In the various creation myths a bird (of undefined species) always figures largely. The image of a bird is seen constantly in the crude art of the country poker-work, etc. ; but the writer has found no trace of a bird becoming an object of worship. The nearest approach to this is the measure of respect shown to the vulture and the turkey-buzzard. These loathsome birds are found in great numbers in the towns. They haunt trees in the market-places and waddle about the streets picking up all manner of refuse. They are bolder than city sparrows or domestic fowls. Since they devour the sacrifices placed in the streets for the idols, they are called *eiye orisha, i.e.* " birds of the orisha," and are never molested in any way.

Among the Yorubas no reptile is raised to the rank of a god, or orisha, although crocodiles are honoured as being the slaves of *Olosa*, the lagoon-goddess. Colonel Ellis, in his *Ewe-speaking Peoples*, states that among those tribes " the crocodile is worshipped at Bageida, Porto Seguro, Savi, Porto Novo and Badagry " and that formerly " a numerous priesthood was set apart for their

service." [1] Among the *Ibo* tribes of the *Oweri* district (near neighbours of the Yorubas) the boa-constrictor is worshipped. On the 27th day of each month a white cock is offered to him, with cowries, palm-oil or palm-nuts, white cloth and kola-nuts. The sacrifice is deposited at cross-roads, away from the town. There is, however, no reptile-worship among the Yorubas, except in the case of crocodiles belonging to Olosa the lagoon-goddess, as described in a later chapter.

Man.—Man is never worshipped as man ; but only as being indwelt by some divine spirit. The nearest approach to the worship of man *qua* man is in the worship of one's own head. Yoruba psychology teaches that each man possesses, or is indwelt by, three spirits, viz. : *Olori* (the " Lord of the head "), *Ipin Ijeun* (the " Sharer of the Food "), who dwells in the stomach, and *Ipori*, who inhabits the great toe. The first is worshipped and sacrifices are offered to him. He is the " luck " of the man and brings him good fortune. Various orishas are men who have been deified after death, *e.g.* great kings, heroes and magicians. The worship of ancestors is also general.

There are certain instances of worship paid to human beings during their lifetime, which are interesting and important, notably in the case of *kings*, and of *twins*. All kings, such as the *Alafin* of *Oyo*, the *Alake* of *Abeokuta*, the *Oni* of *Ife*, and the *Awujale* of *Ijebu Ode*, are divine, and reverence amounting to worship (but not sacrifice) is paid to them in their lifetime. Up to thirty years ago, the Alake of Abeokuta never left his own compound, but the new Alake who then came to the throne did so and paid a visit to the writer. He afterwards came to England and was received by King Edward VII. The face of the Awujale of Ijebu Ode was never seen, even by

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 71.

his own subjects. He always communicated with them through a screen. That the divinity residing in the king is something beyond his own personality is shown by the following custom. The Yoruba word for "to reign" is *joba*, from *je*, "to eat" and *oba*, "a king." This is due to the fact that when a new monarch is appointed he has to eat the heart of his predecessor, and to retain and worship, as long as he lives and reigns, the head of the same. At his own decease this head is buried with his body and his own head detached and his heart extracted for his successor to do likewise. The king's crown and throne become sacred. In a paper on "Lagos, Abeokuta and the Alake," read by Sir William MacGregor (Governor of Lagos), before the African Society, he writes, "Among the Yorubas of West Africa . . . the king's crown is sacred and is supposed to be the shrine of a spirit, which has to be propitiated. When the King (*Oni*) of Ife visited Lagos some years ago, he had to sacrifice five sheep to his crown between Ibadan and Ife, a two days' journey on foot."[1] The Ashantis of the Gold Coast believe that "the throne or chair of a king or chief is inhabited by a spirit to which it is consecrated and to which sacrifices are offered."[2]

Twin children are sacred throughout the Yoruba country, but whereas in the Niger and Ondo districts (until checked by the British Government) all such had to be sacrificed, in Abeokuta and Yoruba proper such are, and for long have been, regarded as demi-gods, the mother herself paying them special honour while living, and, should one die, replacing it by a wooden image which must be carried about, washed, etc., as though still living, and to which sacrifices of food must be offered.

[1] *Journal of the African Society*, No. 12, July, 1904, p. 472.
[2] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd edn., i. p. 364.

The mother herself receives congratulations from her neighbours, and presents, as an offering to the wee deities.

Life and its Transmissions. — Under this heading must be included a number of gods of a superior order, which are not represented by any of the former classes. Chief among them are those who (traditionally) took part in the creation of man, those who concern themselves with his preservation and with the reproduction of the race, and some who injure or destroy the same. Such are *Obatala* ("King of whiteness"), an extremely good orisha, *Odudua*, his wife, and their offspring, *e.g. Yemaja, Olokun, Ogun*, and others, who cannot be traced back to any human origin, but seem to have been always accepted as unseen spiritual powers. Nearly all of these are represented by some visible object, or "idol," usually an image made of wood or earth, or some special piece of rock or stone, either in its natural rough condition, or artificially cut and polished. Many shrines are seen in the open streets of great towns, containing an image, sacred mound of earth, etc. Some of these are described and illustrated in the following chapters.

Having thus reviewed some of the many objects of worship, we are now in a position to consider the "spirits" which are believed to indwell or lie behind them. These are described in the succeeding chapters, as the "Objects of Belief."

CHAPTER III

THE OBJECTS OF BELIEF. (A) THE SUPREME DEITY

THE writer, when living in the Yoruba country, found that the worship of the people showed a belief in spiritual beings of various types, falling properly into four distinct classes, viz. : (A) a Supreme Deity, *Olorun* by name ; (B) a large class of Lesser Gods, or *Orishas*, their number being variously stated as 201, or 401, by their *babalawos*, or priests, but probably comprising over 600 ; (C) the Spirits of the Dead (Ancestor-worship, etc.) ; (D) a supreme Spirit of Evil, *Eshu*, *i.e.* the " Devil."

(A) **The Supreme Deity—Olorun.**—Anthropologists are divided in opinion as to whether there is to be found in the religion of primitive races a belief in one Supreme Being, and whether, if found, such a conception is not merely that of a glorified ghost, or of a nature god who has " outgrown the deities of that class and come to occupy an isolated position." [1] Dr. Andrew Lang has clearly shown that such a conception is found, and that this cannot have been evolved from sheer animism.[2]

We find among the Yorubas a belief in a Being called *Olorun*, whose position is unique in several respects, as will be shown. He is regarded, by pagans, Mohammedans

[1] Menzies, *History of Religion*, p. 36.
[2] *The Making of Religion*, Chaps. IX. and XI.

and Christians alike, as the one Supreme Eternal Being, and that this is not due to Mohammedan or Christian influence is evident from the fact that such was the pagan belief before either of the latter religions came into the country, and this again is proved by the traditional accounts of creation held by all classes of pagans, particularly those who never came under the influence of the foreign religions. Yet the late Colonel Ellis, in his book, *Yoruba-speaking Peoples*, classes Olorun among the orishas, and says " he is the deified firmament " and " merely a nature-god, the personally divine sky, and he only controls phenomena connected in the native mind with the roof of the world." To support his contention he gives fanciful and very inaccurate derivations to the divine titles *Eleda* and *Olodumare*. Furthermore, he brings the following charge against " missionaries " :

> Just as the missionaries have caused Nyankupon, Nyonmo, and Mawu to be confused with the Jehovah of the Christians, by translating these names as " God," so have they done with Olorun, whom they consider to be a survival from a primitive revelation, made to all mankind, in the childhood of the world.[1]

The colonel tacitly admits that experienced religious teachers, of various nationalities (French, German and British) and various Christian denominations, among Ashantis, Dahomians and Yorubas, etc., all agree in testifying to the existence of this belief. Yet all this weight of expert testimony he lightly ignores ! He treats Olorun as having been to some extent superseded by *Shango*, the god of lightning. Mr. Dennett, on the other hand, in his *Nigerian Studies*, while he likewise confounds Olorun wth the orishas, suggests that he is a development of Shango,

[1] Dr. Andrew Lang shows, from the soldier's own writings, the weakness of his logic (*The Making of Religion*, pp. 246–250).

otherwise called *Jakuta*! Against the opinion of these two writers, whom we must regretfully regard as superficial observers, we have the judgment and testimony of the late Bishops Crowther and James Johnson, and of Bishop Oluwole, all being Africans and thoughtful men of culture, and of the late Rev. Henry Townsend and Rev. J. Buckley Wood (each of whom lived and worked for over forty years among the Yorubas), and of scores of other missionaries, who have all recognised and testified to the fact that the Yorubas have a clear conception of the one Supreme Deity, whom they call *Olorun*.

Dr. R. H. Nassau, after a lifelong experience among the Bantu tribes of the Gaboon and Ogowe districts of the French Congo, bears a similar testimony as to the existence of a corresponding belief among those peoples.[1] Professor D. G. Brinton, of Pennsylvania University, writes, "It has been abundantly shown that amid the tribes of the West Coast of Africa, to whose gods the term fetich, *feitiço*, was first applied by the Portuguese, the recognition and worship of tribal and national divinities and even of a Supreme Being, ruler and creator of the world, are clearly displayed."[2] An earlier observer and writer, Mr. F. J. Hutchinson, British consul at Fernando Po, says, "The idea of God entertained by the Kalabarese is confined to their incomprehensibility of natural causes, which they attribute to *Abasi-Ibun*, the Efik term for Almighty God; hence they believe He is too high and too great to listen to their prayers and petitions."[3] The Rev. J. L. Wilson, for eighteen years an American missionary in West Africa, writes:

"The belief in one great Supreme Being, who made and

[1] *Fetichism in West Africa*, Chaps. II. and IV.
[2] *Religion of Primitive Peoples*, p. 133.
[3] *Impressions of West Africa* (London, 1858).

upholds all things, is universal. Nor is this idea imperfectly or obscurely engraved in their minds. The impression is so deeply engraved upon their moral and mental nature, that any system of atheism strikes them as too absurd and preposterous to require a denial. Everything which transpires in the natural world beyond the power of man, or of spirits, who are supposed to occupy a somewhat higher place than man, is at once and spontaneously ascribed to the agency of God. All of the tribes of the country with which the writer has become acquainted (and they are not a few) have a name for God, and many of them have two or more, significant of His character as a Maker, Preserver and Benefactor. In the Grebo country *Nyiswa* is the common name for God, indicative of His character as a Maker. In Ashanti He has two names, viz.: *Yankumpon*, which signifies 'My Great Friend,' and *Yemi*, 'my Maker.'" [1]

Such is the testimony of many expert and experienced witnesses to the fact that, throughout West Africa, both among Negro and Bantu tribes, there is a belief in a Supreme Deity. Evidence of the existence of such a belief among the Yorubas will now be given.

First, we have the witness of the names and titles given to this Deity:

Olorun.—This is the name by which He is generally mentioned. It signifies "Owner of Heaven." *Orun* (the Yoruba word for "heaven") may be compared with the Greek Οὐρανός, and with the *Varuna* of the Rig-Veda, with which it may perhaps be philologically connected. Like the English "heavens" and the Hebrew שָׁמַיִם, it is used for the "sky" as well as for the dwelling-place of the Deity. This title, then, expresses the greatness and majesty of God.

Eleda.—This word is derived from *da*, "to create," from

[1] *Western Africa* (London, 1856), p. 209.

which we get *eda*, "creation," and then *Eleda*, "maker" or "owner of creation." This term, therefore, signifies that He is the Maker and Preserver of the created universe. Logically, it follows that this conception of Him cannot have been derived, or evolved, from animism, for He, as Creator, must have existed prior to all the created universe. Dr. Andrew Lang says, "The Supreme Being of savage faiths as a rule never died at all. He belonged to a world that knew no death." [1]

Alaye.—This word, from *ye*, "to live," *aye*, "life," or "a living thing," denotes "the Owner of Life." It is more spiritual than the last-named term, referring to the living principle rather than the creature in which that principle resides. It must not be confounded with *Alaiye*, "the Owner of the world," or "of the universe," *aiye* including both the earth and the heavens.

Olodumare.—The derivation of this word is uncertain. It is generally taken to denote "the Almighty One." Bishops Crowther and Johnson so regard it, but the latter gives as an alternative "The Ever-righteous One." A slightly different form of the word is "*Olodumaye*, "the Self-existent One."

Elemi.—"The Owner of Breath." *Emi* is "breath" or "spirit" (Greek πνεῦμα).

Oga-ogo.—"The High One of Glory." This term is used, like the others given above, "only of the Supreme Being" (Crowther).

Other titles, such as Oluwa, "Lord," commonly applied to Him, are sometimes given to orishas, or to living human beings, and therefore are not given here.

The second line of evidence is found in the attributes ascribed to this Deity, Olorun, by pure pagans, who have never been influenced by Christians or Mohammedans, although it is not suggested that every pagan Yoruba has a complete conception of all these attributes as belonging to Olorun. He is credited with omniscience, absolute power, justice, goodness and benevolence, and generally, or at least frequently, with omnipresence. He

[1] *The Making of Religion*, p. 202.

is called *mimo, i.e.* " holy," *alanu,* " merciful," and is said to preserve men's lives and to give them all good things, notwithstanding the fact that prayer for particular blessings is generally offered to other gods, and, in many cases, even to the devil. The writer, visiting one morning in a village at some distance from Abeokuta, where there was no Christian, after offering the usual salutations, asked the following questions : " Who created us ? "—" Who preserves us ? "—" Who gives us food ? "—" Who sends us rain and sunshine ? " To each question the answer was given, " *Olorun ni,*" *i.e.* " It is God ! " And this was the usual experience on such visits. Occasionally, some very ignorant person would say, " *A o mo !* " *i.e.* " We do not know," or would give credit to his or her own particular idol, but such were rare exceptions.

Again, the proverbs of the Yoruba tribes, which are very many, often refer to Olorun, and in such a way as to show His supremacy and excellence, *e.g. Eniti a ko le mu, a fi won le Olorun lowo, i.e.* " Those whom we cannot catch we leave in the hands of God." This proverb implies belief in His omniscience, omnipotence and justice. And again, *O fi ija fun Olorun ja, fowo le eran, i.e.* " Leave the battle to God and rest your head upon your hand."

Moreover, in the case of the various orishas, there is nearly always some history, or myth, to account for the origin of the particular cult. In the case of Olorun there is nothing of this kind. He is pre-existent to all human knowledge. In the language of the New Testament, He is " the Unknown God," having " neither beginning of days nor end of life." There are traditional stories of His work in creation, and many West African negroes have traditions of a time when there was direct communication between heaven and earth.

The foregoing facts sufficiently establish the truth

of the statement that the Yorubas have a conception of a Supreme Deity, who holds a position that is unique among their various Objects of Belief. He is to be regarded as probably the same Being whom the Tschwis call *Nyankupon*, the Gas *Nyonmo*, the Ewes *Mawu*, and the Bantu tribes of the south-west coast, *Nzambi*, *Anyambi*, etc.

The Yoruba pagan having some mental conception of this Supreme Deity, we next inquire as to his attitude of mind towards Him, first remarking that, while the study of African psychology is very fascinating, it is equally difficult and perplexing. Miss Mary Kingsley says, "Stalking the West African idea is one of the most charming pursuits in the world . . . as beset with difficulty and danger as grizzly-bear hunting." African mentality is extremely complex, and equally variable, not only as between different individuals, but often in one and the same person.

Fear has been said to be the first element in religious psychology, but it does not appear to hold a prominent place in the Yoruba's conception of Olorun, as it does in his regard for the orishas and the evil spirit, Eshu. The only aspect of fear, as distinct from reverence, or awe, that seems to exist in this conception of Him, is the fear of retribution, and that not in the sense of vindictiveness, but of offended justice. The feeling of awe, or reverence, for Him, is, however, strongly marked. He is spoken of as high and holy, and to such an extent that direct worship seems never to be offered to Him. The idea started by Ellis, and copied from him by Dennett and Miss Kingsley, that the Supreme Deity started the work of creation, both of the universe and of man, and then indolently left it to others and took no further interest in it—became a spiritual nonentity in fact—and therefore is not worshipped, or regarded, is an utterly incorrect presentation

of the Yoruba conception of Him. The reason that He is not directly worshipped is that He is regarded as too exalted for man to approach with the familiarity (albeit respectful) that is shown towards the lesser deities. The fact of the existence of this reverential awe, and also of a measure of faith in Him, is clearly shown by the fact that He is constantly mentioned in daily conversation, as will be illustrated shortly. Although the higher aspects of love to God are beyond the capacity of the unenlightened pagan mind, traces of love to Him are occasionally found among the more thoughtful and earnest Yorubas, and gratitude (although often of an apparently conventional type) is constantly expressed.

The manifestation of this conception is shown both in a negative and in a positive manner.

On the negative side, sacrifice, which in various forms plays such a large part in Yoruba worship, is never offered to Olorun. He is too high and (in a sense) too distant to be thus directly approached. Also (as Dr. Andrew Lang points out) the Supreme Deity, not being a ghost, or disembodied spirit, has no need of food offerings, etc.

Again, prayer, which is likewise constantly offered to the various orishas and to Eshu (the devil), is never directly offered to God, except that, in cases of deepest distress, the ejaculation is uttered, *Olorun shanu, i.e.* "God have mercy!"

On the positive side, the nature of this conception of God is demonstrated by the fact that He is constantly spoken of in daily life, and that the salutations of the pagan Yorubas show trust in His preserving care and beneficent goodness. The final salutation at night is usually, *O d'owuro o! Olorun yio ji ni re o! i.e.* "Until the morning! May God wake us up well!" And the

morning salutation corresponds, *E k'owuro o! O ji re bi? i.e.* "Good morning. Do you wake well?" To which the response is, *A dupe l'odo Olorun!* or *A yin Olorun! i.e.* "Thanks be to God!" or "We praise God!" A similar reply is given to inquiries as to health, etc. Again, when a kindness has been shown to any person, the usual response is, *Olorun yio busi i fun o! i.e.* "May God bless you!" or some similar expression of gratitude.

The proverbs of the country, already quoted to show the belief in the Supreme Deity, also manifest the nature of that belief, as resting on His goodness, wisdom and might. Faith in His justice to execute judgment after death may be inferred from the following occasional remarks of Yorubas, smarting under a sense of wrong and of their own inability to avenge it :

Ohun ti o se mi yi, ati emi ati iwo ni iro o niwaju eniti o ri wa; i.e. "As to this thing which you have done to me, both I and you have to account for it before Him who sees us." The reference is to Olorun, who is expressly named in the next quotation, "*Nigbati emi ba ku, ati emi ati iwo ni ilo ro o niwaju Olorun*"; *i.e.* "Whenever I die, both I and you have to go and narrate it before God." [1]

The higher knowledge of the Supreme Deity seems to be restricted to, and jealously guarded by, the few. One morning a youth was brought to the writer's dispensary in Abeokuta for treatment and was recommended as having a special claim upon the Christian missionary's consideration because he was *Omo Olorun*. An inquiry as to what this meant led to the explanation that, very occasionally, when *Ifa* (the supreme oracle) is consulted as to what orisha a new-born child is to worship, the answer is given, "He is to worship no orisha. He is to

[1] Bp. J. Johnson, *Isin Orisha Bibo ni Ile Yoruba*, pp. 51 f.

be *omo Olorun*," *i.e.* " a child of God." Here we have a further proof that *Olorun* is not to be regarded as an " orisha " ; but stands apart as the Supreme Deity.

The question as to the origin of this conception in the pagan mind must be briefly considered. It has been suggested that this belief was derived from Mohammedan, or Christian, sources. Now the first introduction of Christianity into the Yoruba country was in A.D. 1838, when Christian Egbas, liberated slaves from Sierra Leone, returned to Lagos and Abeokuta. The first Christian missionaries were sent in 1845. The Yoruba belief in *Olorun* had existed for untold generations before these dates, as is evidenced by the ancient myths concerning His work in creation. There is no record or tradition of any previous Christian witness in the country.[1]

The advance of Mohammedanism during the last thirty years has been very rapid ; but prior to that time, although the Islamic faith had gained a certain number of adherents among the Yorubas, these were a very small proportion of the whole, and some parts of the country were quite untouched by its influence. The Yoruba conception of *Olorun* is quite distinct from the Islamic *Allah*, and there is not the slightest evidence on philological, philosophical, or historical grounds that the two are causally connected.

The Yoruba conception of the Supreme Deity must be regarded as belonging purely to the people in their pagan condition ; but it is not so easy a matter to say certainly whence they derived it. It is difficult to believe that it can have been developed from Animism, for there is a wide gap to be bridged over between the highest of the lesser gods, or orishas, and the Supreme God, *Olorun*. Since He is conceived as being the Author of all creation,

[1] See note at end of this chapter.

He must of necessity be pre-existent to that creation. No Yoruba would allow for a moment that *Olorun* was a deified man.

It has been pointed out by others that the belief in the Supreme Deity among primitive peoples is one which is hazy, and the deity concerned is found to be retiring towards a state of oblivion, and that this is clearly indicative of a declension from previous knowledge, rather than an advance into clearer and fuller truth. We shall have occasion to pursue this subject further in a later chapter.

An Early Roman Catholic Mission.—"Benin was discovered by the Portuguese in 1485. Alfonso de Aviro, the discoverer, on his return to Europe, was accompanied by an ambassador from the King of Benin to the Court of Portugal, with the request that Christian missionaries might be sent to instruct his people. Fernando Po was sent to the Gulf of Benin and . . . ascended the Benin River to a place called Gaton, where he founded a Portuguese settlement. A church was built and 1000 persons baptised as adherents of the Roman Church. According to Barbot, at a later period, the King of Benin promised to bring over his whole kingdom to the Roman Catholic Church if he was provided with a white wife. The wife was sent, but no conversions seem to have followed, and the Portuguese soon lost possession of Benin." (There is no evidence of this mission having penetrated the Yoruba Country proper.—S. S. F.) J. L. Wilson, *Western Africa*, p. 191.

CHAPTER IV

THE OBJECTS OF BELIEF. (B) THE ORISHAS

UNDER the term "Orisha" are included many gods, stated by the priests generally to be 401 in number, although some say 201, but probably the actual number is at least 600, if not more. The figures given by the priests are the old sacred numbers; but as they have been added to from time to time by the consecration of new deities they can no longer be correct. These orishas vary greatly in the powers attributed to them and in the respect paid to them. Some of them, according to the mythology of the country, were always spirits, of divine origin, existing prior to all creation; others are deified men; others again are the spirits of animals, trees, rocks, etc. They may be classified (according to the respect paid to them) as general orishas, worshipped throughout the country; local deities, and personal ones. The first class will include most of the nature-gods, and the two latter many tutelary ones.

The term "orisha" is of uncertain derivation. It is usually regarded as from *ri*, "to see" or "find," and *sha*, "to pick up, select, or choose." Bishop Johnson says this term "was originally applied to some beings whom *Ifa*, or *Orunmila*, the Son of God, had sent out to search about for, and collect together, the wisdom which

he had strewn about, and who were successful in their search and collection, whilst others failed, and who were spoken of as *awon ti o ri sa, i.e.* those who were successful in making their collection, and who after, and in consequence of this, became objects of worship." Other suggestions have been made, of which Dennett's conjecture that it means " the beatified departed one " (as if from *ore,* " a departed spirit ") cannot be correct, since the chief orishas never were human beings, and so cannot be *ores,* or departed spirits !

Modes of worship will be dealt with in a later chapter ; but we may here note that each orisha has its own special days for worship, demands its own special sacrifices, and enjoins its own *ewo*—the Yoruba term for " taboo." When reference is made to human sacrifices as demanded by any deity, it denotes that such were offered until the country came under British government thirty years ago, when all such were forbidden ; but afterwards, even when British officers were stationed in Ibadan to enforce the keeping of the treaty abolishing such practices, the writer had personal experience of the offering of a human sacrifice in the said town in the year 1894. It is quite possible that such are secretly offered even now.

It is certain that some of the Yoruba divinities have been borrowed from other tribes. This is the case with *Shango,* the god of lightning, and his wife *Oya,* the river Niger, who have both been imported from the Niger territory. *Eko-Ifa* comes from the Akoko tribe, *Aje* from the Ekun, or Popo tribe.

We now proceed to the consideration of some of the more important orishas.

Ifa.—Although not possessing so great a number of personal devotees as some of the other gods, *Ifa* may be regarded as the most important and the supreme orisha,

for he is the greatest oracle of the whole Yoruba country and is consulted on all important occasions. He decides what orisha each new-born child is to worship. He tells, in time of trouble, famine, sickness, etc., which gods have been offended and what sacrifices they demand.

There are various mythical stories as to the origin of this cult. One of these states that he was the offspring of *Obatala* and *Odudua*, who were pre-existent to man, so that Ifa is not a deified man, but was a god before the creation of the world. On the other hand, in a Yoruba pamphlet, published by the Egba Government in Abeokuta in 1906, by Mr. Oyesile Keribo, on the "History of the Gods," he writes as follows :

> Ifa was a native of Itase near the Ife country, and of poor parentage. In his youth he had great aversion to manual labour, and therefore had to beg his bread. To better his condition he applied to a wise man for advice, and this sage taught him the art of divination, traditional stories with matters relating thereto, and medicine, as an easy means of obtaining a livelihood. He afterwards became very popular. The sixteen original *odus* correspond to the sixteen original stories taught to Ifa, etc. His parents, being poor, were not known in the country. Hence he was afterwards considered as without parentage and was deified after death.

Other accounts represent him as a skilful medical man and diviner, born at Ife, and according to some very popular, but to others unpopular. Colonel Ellis says :

> He tried to teach prediction to the inhabitants of Ife; but they would not listen, so he left the town and wandered about, indulging in a variety of amours, then fixed his abode at Ado, where he planted a palm-nut on a rock, whence sprang up sixteen palm-trees at once.

No reliance can be placed on any of these stories,

which appear to have been invented by lovers of the marvellous, to gain a reputation for knowledge. The following myth, however, has much more importance, as explaining the very close connection between *Ifa* and *Eshu*, which exists to the present day : [1]

In the early days of the world, when the human race was few in number, the gods were stinted in sacrifices and so often went hungry and had to forage for themselves. Ifa took to fishing, but had no success, and, being hungry, consulted *Eshu* (who is also called *Elegba*), who told him that if he could obtain sixteen palm-nuts from the two palm-trees of *Orungan*, the chief man, he would show Ifa how to forecast the future. Ifa could then use his knowledge to forecast the future and benefit mankind, and so receive abundance of offerings in return ; but he stipulated that the first choice of all offerings should be *his*. Ifa agreed, and went to Orungan to ask for the nuts, telling him for what purpose he required them. Orungan, delighted at the prospect, took his wife with him and hastened to get the nuts ; but, finding the trees too high, drove the monkeys to them, who ate the pulp of the fruit and threw down the "nuts," *i.e.* the hard shell which contains an oily kernel. Orungan's wife, *Orishabi* by name, tied these in her waist-cloth, as a child is carried, and so bore them to Ifa. Elegba (Eshu) then taught Ifa, who, in turn, taught Orungan, and so made him the first *babalawo*. Therefore, when a man goes to consult Ifa, his wife always accompanies him, or, if he is unmarried, his mother, and the woman carries the sixteen palm-nuts. Also, the babalawo, before beginning the divining process, utters the invocation, *Orungan, a juba o ! Orisabi, a juba o ! i.e.* "Orungan, we respect thee ! Orishabi, we regard thee ! "

The priests of Ifa are called *babalawos* (*baba-li-awo*, the father who has the secret) and find their office very lucrative, so that a proverb says, "the wisest priest is he who adopts the worship of Ifa." These priests pluck off all hair, shave their heads, and generally wear

[1] See the illustration on p. 90.

white clothes, although some, as those at Ife, wear light blue.

In consulting the oracle, the babalawo uses sixteen palm-nuts, from a special palm-tree (the *Opelifa*), and a divining bowl, *i.e.* an engraved circular board, or a rectangular one, with a handle, similar to a Mohammedan writing tablet, shaped thus :

Sometimes a fan is used, of a square shape. This divining bowl is called *Opon-Ifa*. Its surface is covered with white flour (*iyerosu*), or dust, from the *irosu* tree. Upon this the priest works, and with one of the fingers of the right hand imprints certain signs, to indicate such Ifa representatives as may be left in the palm of his left hand, after he has attempted with one grasp of the palm of his right hand to take up all the sixteen nuts which were held therein. Or, he may hold these sixteen nuts loosely in the right hand and throw them through his half-closed fingers into the left hand. If two nuts remain in the right hand, he makes one mark, thus |, on the board ; but if only one remains, he makes two such marks, ||. This process is repeated eight times, and the marks are made in two columns of four each. The complicated nature of this process is shown by the fact that behind each of the sixteen nuts are sixteen subordinate deities. Each such deity is termed an *Odu*, *i.e.* a " chief " or " head." There are thus $16 \times 16 = 256$ leading Odus, and each of these 256 has 16 subordinates again, bringing the total number of Odus to 4096. Some

increase this again by multiplying each of these by 16 lesser subordinates! Add to these figures the fact that in the 8 throwings, or drawings, of the 16 nuts, there is a possibility of a vast number of different results, and that in connection with each Odu there are supposed to be 1680 traditional stories, each of which is represented by a brief couplet, which must be memorised, and it will be seen that the task of a babalawo is no light one, even if he confines his attention, as is usually the case, to the 16 principal Odus. Most babalawos commit to memory a large number of the couplets, or stories in brief, connected with each of the principal ones. Then, when an Odu appears on the consulting bowl, the diviner thinks of the most appropriate story attached to it, suitable to the case about which he is consulted, and so gives the oracular response and prescribes the appropriate sacrifice. It follows that these men should be deep thinkers, and such is found to be the case.

The response of an Odu is given in the form of a parable. So that it is a common saying :

Owe ni Ifa ipa,
Omoran ni imo—
Bi a ba wipe a mo—
Nigbati a ko ba mo,
A ni, ko se!

that is,

"Ifa always speaks in parables,
It is the wise man who understands—
If we should say we understand—
The wise man will understand—
When we do not understand,
We say, It is of no account!
(or, It is not fulfilled!)"

When the babalawo is particularly fortunate, and *Eji*

Ogbe, the prince of all the Odus, appears on the edge of the bowl, he may be heard saying, with the authority of *Eji Ogbe :*

Bi a ba bo oju,
Bi a ba bo imu,
Isale agbon ni a ipari re.

Ada fun Orunmila nigbatijo nlo gba ase l'owo Olodumare ; o rubo. Olodumare si wa fi ase fun u. Nigbati gbogbo aiye gbo pe o ti gba ase l'owo Olodumare, nwon si nwo to. Gbogbo eyiti o wi si nse. Lati igba na wa ni a nwipe, A se !

that is,

When we wash our face,
When we wash our nose,
We finish off beneath the chin.

Ifa was consulted for Orunmila once, going to receive authority from the Almighty. He sacrificed. And the Almighty gave him authority. When all the world heard that he had received authority from the Almighty they came to him. All that he said came to pass. Ever since then we say, " It will come to pass ! "

The cost of initiation as a babalawo is very great, sometimes as much as £150, a vast sum to a Yoruba. The course of training is long (from three to seven years), and the ritual of initiation elaborate, including purification by water, and the test of extinguishing the *Odu* fire, or *Pinodu*, as explained in Chapter II.

While the chief function of Ifa is that of divination, he is also credited, as a secondary one, with the power to cause fecundity. Women pray to him to be made fruitful ; therefore offerings are made to him before marriage, sterility being accounted a disgrace. But, although Ifa is supposed to cause conception, he does not form the child *in utero*, that being the office of *Obatala*.

He has many subsidiary titles, one of the most important of these being Orunmila, which means literally "Heaven knows salvation." *Ela*, another of his attributive names, and a principal one, is a contraction of *Orunmila*, and is intended to represent him to his worshippers chiefly in the character of saviour and deliverer, one that is strong and mighty, unconquerable even by death, so that all who look to him for help in any time of trouble, or threatened evil, even in death, will not fail to receive his help. Although this name is used as if it represented a separate and distinct personality, and is attached to a separate and distinct representative figure, made of pieces of ivory, carrying four eyelets each and corresponding in number to the Ifa palm-nuts (*Ikin*), which, with one *Oduso*, are seventeen in all, Ela is, nevertheless, the same deity as Ifa, represented after a special manner. Very special and lofty titles are given to him, and in songs and proverbs full salvation is ascribed to him. His worshippers say, "*Awa di Oyigiyigi, a ki o ku mo*," *i.e.* "We ourselves are become Oyigiyigi, (*i.e.* the stone which gave birth to Ifa) and we can die no more!" Ela holds a very high place in Ifa worship, and is found in connection with each of the 256 Odus of the system. It is always humbly and reverently invoked and its favour sought for acceptance whenever Ifa is to be worshipped with a sacrifice, *e.g.*:

"O thou Ela! Son of the Ruler,
I humble myself before thee!"

or,

"O Ela! I praise the sacrifice of acceptance,—
O Ela! I praise the life-giving sacrifice,—
O Ela! I praise the sacrifice of labour."

Harvest offerings are always presented to him.[1]

[1] Bp. J. Johnson, *Isin Bibo Orisha*, p. 29.

Opele is the name of a lesser oracle, who is regarded as a messenger of Ifa. He is represented by eight small laths of wood, and as it is a far easier task to consult him, the babalawos do so each day, and in all lesser causes; but Ifa must be consulted every fifth day (Yoruba reckoning), for that ushers in the new week and is Ifa's day, and at any other time on any important matter. The bandicoot is sacred to Opele, since it lives chiefly on palm-nuts. On Ifa's day, sacrifices of pigeons, fowls and goats are made to him, and on very important occasions he has demanded human sacrifice.

There are other divinities which are consulted as oracles, but this is not their chief function, and they are (as oracles) all inferior to Ifa. Some are local, and only approachable at special seasons, as the *Oro Ilare* of the Ijeshas (a sub-division of the Yoruba race) in the north-east. This deity is said to come to earth once a year, when he dwells in a special grove, and is waited upon and consulted by an *Aworo*, a chief priest. The orishas *Oshun*, *Yemaja*, and *Oshosi* are consulted by their devotees, and so is *Eshu* (*Elegbara*), the evil spirit, whose answer is never disregarded.

Obatala.—We have dealt with Ifa first, as being the great oracle, and so seeming to attain greater prominence than the other orishas. Next to him in importance, and exceeding him in the number of his worshippers, is *Obatala*. This name signifies "King of whiteness." He is the god of purity. Another title is *Orishala* (*i.e. Orisha —nla*) *i.e.* "the great orisha." Other designations are: *Obaba Arugbo* ("the ancient King-Father"), *Orishapopo*, the orisha who kneads clay, and *orisha oj'enia* = "the orisha who enters man." These last two names refer to his traditional part in the creation of humanity. He

is also called *Orisha gbingbiniki, i.e.* " The huge (or bulky) orisha " (Crowther).

A tradition of his origin is that he was made by Olorun, who, after he had created the universe, handed it over to Obatala to set it in order, give the finishing touches, and then conduct its course. The myths concerning him (as in the case of all the leading orishas) are far more anthropomorphic than anything told of Olorun. They tell how God formed man in the rough, and left Obatala to give him a face, eyes, ears, nose, mouth and skull—presumably, brain also—so that the senses and intellect of man are ascribed to him. A second myth says Obatala formed man out of clay. Yet another myth says that *Odudua* (not Olorun—see below) formed man's body of clay and Obatala completed the work as just stated, and that *Olodumare* (" the Almighty," *i.e.* Olorun) breathed into man and so he became " a living soul." It is the work of Obatala (when Ifa has caused conception) to form the child *in utero ;* hence any physical defect in the new-born child is attributed to him, and such child is dedicated to him from birth. This is notably the case with albinos. It is supposed that such defects are to show his displeasure at having been neglected, or to demonstrate his power.

Another of his offices is that of civic guardianship. He is called " protector of the town gates," and is roughly depicted on the doors of his temples as a horseman with a spear, attended by a leopard, tortoise, fish and serpent. His image, likewise, is that of the horseman with a spear.

His worshippers must wear white clothes, and eat white food, using shea-butter (instead of the usual red palm-oil) in their cooking, abstaining from red meat, and using and offering the white (or " bitter ") kola instead of the red one. His special offering is that of

edible snails. The necklace worn by his worshipper must be of opaque white beads.

There is no record of his ever desiring human sacrifice. According to one myth he once lived on earth, attaining a very great age, but was so disgusted with man's ways that he voluntarily ascended to heaven.[1] It will be seen that this orisha represents the highest conception of goodness represented in Yoruba polytheism, apart from the belief in the Supreme God. He represents the nearest approach to the Jewish conception of the "Word."[2]

Odudua.—As Obatala is the highest male orisha among the Yorubas, so *Odudua*, also called *Odua*, is the chief goddess. In one point she excels Obatala, for she is not said to have been made by Olorun, but to have had independent existence, before that great orisha was created.

Here again the derivation of the name is uncertain. It may come from *dudu*, "black," and *iwa*, "existence," and so mean "the Black One." F. S. (the unidentified writer of a series of articles on Yoruba deities in the *Nigerian Chronicle*) says that this title was given, after his death, to one of the original immigrants into Yoruba-land about the eleventh or twelfth century, and that his real name was lost. He regards *Odudua* as a contraction of *Odu ti o da wa*, which means a "self-existent personage"—literally it is "Chief who created us" or ". . . who created existence." The myths given by this writer vary greatly from the generally received traditions of the country, and are strongly Euhemeristic. He gives a human origin for leading orishas which, according to

[1] F. S., *Nigerian Chronicle*, Vol. I. No. 18, March 19, 1909.

[2] Dennett calls Orishala "the female form of Obatala." I have not found any ground for this. Yet the accounts given by different natives vary so greatly that some may hold this idea, but it is not general.—S. S. F.

general tradition, existed prior to the creation of man; but his interesting stories would be more acceptable if they had some authoritative corroboration.

Odudua is also called *Iya Agbe, i.e.* "Mother of the Gourd" (or ". . . of the closed calabash.") She is always figured in a sitting posture, nursing a child. She is said to be the wife of Obatala, and their union is sometimes regarded as symbolising the union between the earth and the heavens (*i.e.* sky). The babalawos illustrate this union by two large flat cut calabashes, carefully whitened, which, having been once joined, can never be opened. These are kept in their temples, the one over the other, to represent the meeting of earth and sky on the horizon.

The myths do not represent her in any favourable light; but credit her with blindness, which was inflicted on her by her husband, who tore out her eyes as a punishment, because in the beginning of the world, when they were both shut up in the darkness of a closed calabash, she complained bitterly and railed on him. As soon as he blinded her, she cursed him in the words, "Naught shalt thou eat but snails." Again, she is said to have forsaken her husband through an illicit passion for a hunter. She fled from Ife to Ado (fifteen miles from Badagry). There a town was built and a temple dedicated in her honour, and there, at her festival season, cattle and sheep are sacrificed, and the women who are her devotees give themselves up to unbridled immorality in her honour. She is regarded as the patroness of "love" (!). The term *ado* is applied as a reproach to immoral persons of either sex. It is remarkable that such a good deity as Obatala should be credited with possessing such a wicked wife.

Yemaja.—Before Obatala was deserted by Odudua, she is said to have borne him a son and daughter, *Aganju* and *Yemaja* respectively. This brother and sister

eventually married and had a son *Orungan*, who committed incest with his mother, Yemaja. She fled from him in horror and shame, but he pursued her until she fell. Her body swelled to a great size; from her breasts flowed two streams of water which became a lagoon, and from her body issued a number of different orishas, including *Shango* (the god of lightning), *Oya* (the Niger), *Oshun*, *Oba* (three rivers which became the three wives of Shango), *Olokun* (god of the sea), *Olosa* (the lagoon-goddess), *Orishako* (farm-god), *Oke* (god of the hills), *Dada* (vegetable-god), *Aje Shaluga* (god of wealth), *Ogun* (war-god), *Oshori* (hunters' god), *Shopono* (smallpox god).[1] According to this myth, the sacred town of Ife was built on the site of this marvellous catastrophe, and became the sacred city of *Yemaja*. The place where her body fell used to be shown; but the original town was destroyed in the war between the Ibadans and Modakekes and the people of Ife in 1882. The town was rebuilt and is still the most sacred spot in the whole country. It will be noted that nearly all the mythical stories are connected with this place, and that this particular myth makes Yemaja to be the mother and Obatala and Odudua the grandparents, of a number of leading deities, all being nature-gods. There are, however, very many other orishas whose descent is not so traced.

In practice, we find that Yemaja is a goddess who is greatly venerated. She is the presiding goddess of the river *Ogun*, which flows past Abeokuta and into the lagoon near Lagos. The accompanying photograph shows a shrine dedicated to her in Abeokuta, which the writer has passed scores of times. He has never seen a heathen man, or woman, pass it without doing reverence. This is

[1] Ellis includes *Orun* (the sun) and *Oshu* (the moon); but these are not now regarded as orishas, nor is any worship offered to them.

SHRINE OF THE GODDESS YEMAJA.

facing p. 46.

the only such shrine, or temple, of which he could say this. Some worshippers simply inclined the head towards the central image, others laid hold of the thatched roof and bowed, others again entered the hut, prostrated themselves and embraced the image. The image was small, a crudely engraved piece of wood, covered with a cloth. The dilapidated water-pots contained water brought up from the sacred river Ogun. The worshippers of Yemaja wear a necklace of small beads of clear glass.

Of Yemaja's husband, Aganju, and their son, Orungan, little is known, nor do they seem to receive any worship, except that Orungan is saluted when Ifa is consulted. *Aganju* means a "wilderness" or broad expanse, as a great forest or the ocean. *Orungan* signifies "noon," or the sun at its zenith.

Shango.—No deity, perhaps, is better known, or more worshipped, throughout Yorubaland, than *Shango*, the god of lightning, although those already described may be more ancient. This is the more remarkable, because he is not strictly of Yoruba origin, but was introduced from the Niger territory. The derivation of Shango is obscure; but he has another name, by which he is frequently called, *Jakuta*, which means "Stone-thrower." Some speak of Jakuta as a separate deity; but this is not generally accepted. The probability is that Jakuta is the ancient name of the thunder-god, and that when Shango was deified (as related below) he was identified with the deity who had formerly been known as Jakuta. Ellis describes him as purely "anthropomorphic. . . . He dwells in the clouds in an immense brazen palace, where he maintains a large retinue and a great number of horses. . . . He hurls on those who have offended him red-hot chains of iron, which are forged for him by his brother Ogun, a god of the river Ogun [*sic*] of iron and of

war; but this, it should be observed, is seemingly a modern notion, and the red-hot chains furnished by Ogun have a suspicious resemblance to the thunderbolts of Jupiter forged by Vulcan." [1] The colonel does not say whence he derived this information, but that his informant was not reliable is shown by one glaring mistake—the god Ogun being described as god of the river Ogun. The accentuation of the deity's name is different from that of the river, over whom the presiding deity is the goddess Yemaja.

There are various mythical stories about Shango,[2] all more or less unreliable ; but that he was an historical personage is clearly established. The facts as generally accepted, and given as history in *Iwe Kika Ekerin*, the Yoruba Fourth Reader, used in the upper forms of all the elementary schools, are to the following effect :

About two centuries ago (?) there reigned as King in the old town of Oyo (known to early explorers as Eyeo, or Katunga), which was situated near the south bank of the river Niger, to the north of the Yoruba country, one Shango, who was a powerful and wise monarch. He was a great medicine man, or witch-doctor, and claimed to be able to kill people by ejecting fire from his mouth. His reign was tyrannical and cruel. He had two chief ministers of whom he was jealous, and set these to fight against each other, hoping both might be slain ; but he was himself deposed by the one who came off victor in the fight. Shango fled, accompanied by his three wives, Oya, Oshun, and Oba, and some of his most loyal followers. He wandered in the bush, being gradually deserted by all, until only his favourite wife, Oya, remained. Then in despair, Shango hung himself from an *ayan* tree. Oya

[1] Ellis, Col. A. B., *Yoruba-speaking Peoples*, p. 52.
[2] Dennett, R. E., *Nigerian Studies*, pp. 171–173

fled north and became the presiding goddess of the river Niger. Travellers who had seen the body of Shango hanging from a tree entered the town and reported *Oba so, i.e.* "the King has hanged himself." This report spread throughout the town. The friends of Shango were so incensed that they determined to avenge their deceased monarch. They took a number of small calabashes, or hollow gourds, and filled them with gunpowder. They then covered them with cocoanut fibre and put slow matches to them, and waited for the next tornado. When this came, they ignited the bombs and threw them into the thatched roofs of many houses. The resultant explosions and fires caused the panic-stricken people to cry out, "Why are all our houses burning?" The friends of Shango then came forward, saying, "Oh, you said *Oba so*" ("the King has hanged himself")—"*Oba ko so!*" ("the King has *not* hanged himself"). "He is angry with you for this. He has become a god and has gone up into heaven and sent down the lightning to punish you. You must bring out oxen, sheep, fowls, palm-oil, etc., and

The Sacred Axe of Shango.

offer sacrifices to him, and henceforth worship him, and then he will forgive you." Thus they established the worship due to him as an orisha. Thus *Oba so* and *Oba ko so* are proverbial sayings, used respectively by those who want to annoy Shango's worshippers, and the worshippers themselves. The small town of *Kuso*, near to Oyo, is sacred to this deity. Its name is a corruption of *Ko so*. The priests of Shango are called *Oni-Shango*, or *Odushu-shango*. Their chief priests are called *Magbas*. *Magba* (*emi a gba*—"I will take") signifies "a receiver." The priests wear a wallet to "receive" the plunder, or fines which they impose. In some parts, persons struck dead by lightning may not be buried until the body is ransomed from the Magbas, by whom persons struck insensible, but not killed, were formerly despatched. In their chants they speak of Shango as hurling stones (*ja*—"to throw," *okuta*—"a stone"). When a house is struck by lightning they rush in a body to the house, "to find the stone"—no difficult matter since they take the said stone with them![1] They appropriate all the property which they can save from the flames, as "their god has claimed it and given it to them." A chant of the Shango worshippers which is often heard may be translated thus:

O Shango, thou art the master!
Thou takest in thy hand the fiery stones,
To punish the guilty!
To satisfy thy anger!
Everything they strike is destroyed.
The fire eats up the forest,
The trees are broken down,
And all things living are slain.

A very common malediction is, "May Shango's stone strike you!"

[1] See the illustration on p. 93.

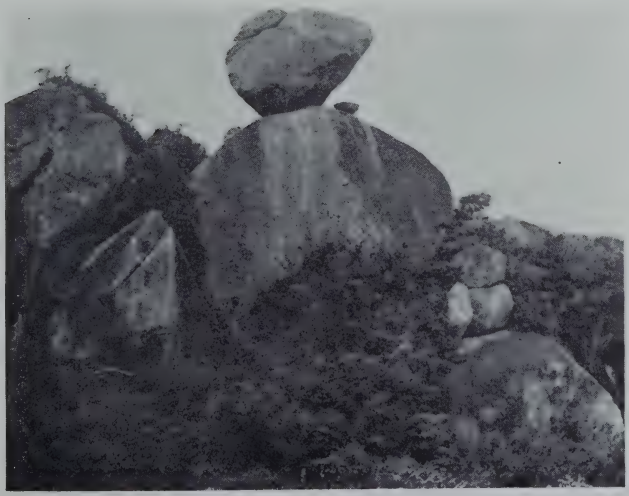
Shango's three wives, as stated above, are the three rivers, Oya (the Niger), Oshun, and Oba, these last being two of the smaller rivers of the Yoruba country. Shango has among his attendants (1) *Oshumare*, the rainbow, who conveys water from the earth to his palace in the clouds, and (2) *Oru*, the thunder clap, whom he sends out as his messenger with great noise. The bird, *papagori*, is sacred to Shango, and the Magbas pretend to understand its speech. The image of Shango, made of wood, is usually a man standing, surrounded by three smaller figures, *i.e.* his wives, with the palms of their hands joined together in front of their bosoms.

Ogun.—Next in importance to Shango is *Ogun*, the god of iron and of war, and pre-eminently the god of hunters. He may be regarded as the Yoruba Nimrod. He is worshipped by blacksmiths, and generally by all users of iron implements, therefore by warriors and hunters. Any piece of iron may represent him, as also may pieces of stone. The Yoruba blacksmith's anvil is a block of stone and is worshipped by him. The accentuation of the name is important, for the word *ogun* has a variety of significations according to its accentuation, or (more correctly) the musical intonation placed upon its two syllables. The failure to recognise this has often caused this orisha to be confounded with the river *Ogun*, and with the term *ogun*, used as a general term for "medicine," usually in a bad sense.

Ogun is stated to have been one of the sons of Yemaja, so that he is one of the earlier deities, pre-existent to man, and not a deified human being. It is said that he first taught men to hunt and that he indicated to them the trees which are specially sacred to himself. These are the *peregun* (the majestic silk-cotton tree), the *akoko* (a tree, the flower of which is sucked for its juice), and the

atori (a tree of very beautiful appearance, remarkable for its elasticity, and from which bows are made). Ogun directed men to dig four holes before a tree and implant in them four wooden posts to support a platform or altar, on which his offerings were to be placed. The accompanying photograph (taken by the writer in Abeokuta) shows one of these trees with four elephants' jaws placed at its foot. This shrine was doubtless dedicated as a thank-offering by hunters after a successful elephant hunt. The chief sacrifice offered to Ogun (except human sacrifice offered before going to war) is the dog ; but fowls are also offered, with the usual accompaniment of palm-oil and lesser articles of food. A proverb says, "an old dog must not be offered to Ogun," *i.e.* nothing inferior must be given to him. A dog's head, or skull, is usually to be seen fastened up in every blacksmith's shop, signifying that this sacrifice has been made. This must be renewed each year. Hunters in the African wilds carry their lives in their hands, consequently they are very particular in serving their gods. Before going on an expedition they usually offer sacrifices to *Ogun* and *Oshosi* (who is a lesser god of the chase), and also to *Eshu*, whom they consult as to their course of action. They kill a cock and pour out its blood to the evil deity. The writer saw this being done at midday one Sunday, as he was returning from taking service in a mission church in Abeokuta. Two men, crouching as low as possible at the roadside, their ankles, knees and hip-joints fully flexed, and their heads bent low, almost hid from view their victim, which was held by one of them, while the other cut its throat and poured out the blood on the devil-stone. The dead fowl is then usually presented at the shrine of Ogun, and afterwards taken away and eaten, kola-nuts being presented to the orisha. Oshosi being an inferior deity has to be content

A SHRINE DEDICATED TO ÒGÚN, THE GOD OF WAR.



ROCKS NEAR ABEOKUTA.

facing p. 52.

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with roasted beans! In former days, before going to war, a human sacrifice had to be offered to Ogun. The victim's head was struck off upon the stool of Ogun, so that the blood gushed out upon it. This is more fully described in a later chapter.

Orishako.—*Orisha Oko*, contracted to *Orishako*, is "god of the farm," *i.e.* of agriculture. A temple dedicated to him is to be found in almost every town, or village. He is particularly worshipped by women and has a number of priestesses. These really form a secret society of their own, and are so powerful, and so highly respected, that no man dare injure, or offend, any of them. They are distinguished by wearing, stuck on to the middle of the forehead, a small vertical badge, about 1 inch long and $\frac{1}{6}$ inch wide, half red and half white. How this badge is made, and how caused to adhere is a secret only known to the wearers. Should the badge become loose, it may be removed and eaten; but must on no account be allowed to fall to the ground. It is accounted the highest honour to have this priesthood in the family, although the expense of initiation, and of maintaining the worship, is very great. The initiation ceremony in each case costs from £40 to £50 (a large sum to a Yoruba). The writer knew one very well-to-do family which was brought to poverty through the expense of worshipping this orisha. When once the iron staff has been introduced into a family it cannot be got rid of! The office is hereditary in the family, but not necessarily in the direct line. When a vacancy occurs Ifa is consulted and determines who of the family is to become priestess. A woman in Abeokuta, who belonged to this cult, gave the following account of how the worship was introduced into her own family to a relative of hers —at that time a schoolmaster, now a highly respected

clergyman—who was collecting information for the writer :

When two women had a quarrel, one would accuse the other of witchcraft (*aje*). The accused replied, "*O dara ! e je k'a lo si Irawo*," *i.e.* " Very well ! Let us go to Irawo." The accuser then replied, " Yes ! let us go ! " This, as will be seen, was a challenge to one form of trial by ordeal, which *must* involve the death of one of the disputants. They then each prepared a calabash, scraped perfectly clean and white, together with a sacrifice, and a present for the priest to whom they were going. For some days before setting out they perambulated their own town, each advertising her grievance : " So-and-so accuses me of being a witch. If I am guilty, may Polo kill me," or " I accuse So-and-so of being a witch. If I am guilty may Polo kill me." They then took their journey to Irawo, the town sacred to the worship of Orishako. On arrival, they stated their case to the priest and each presented to him her own calabash, together with the present. They then had to lie prostrate on the earth for three days, while the priest was within the temple apparently consulting the god. On the third day he re-appeared and, as they still lay prostrate before him, swung over their heads a heavy iron club, chanting as he did so, *Polo pa a ; Polo jowo re—Polo pa a ; Polo jowo re, i.e.* " Polo kill her ; Polo let her go ! " etc. Having repeated this invocation a sufficient number of times, he then again retired into the temple, and came forth a second time, bearing in his hands the two calabashes, and returned each to its respective owner. Whereas the inside of each was perfectly white when committed to him, they now found on lifting the lids that, while the one remained white, the whole of the interior of the other was a jet black, condemning its owner as the guilty one. Instantly the priest

slew this unfortunate one with the iron club, "Polo." The innocent party was not yet free. She had to purchase at a great cost, this iron club, which became her orisha, that is to say, she became its slave, or in other words, a priestess of Orishako.

Ellis says correctly, "An emblem of Orisha Oko is an iron rod and honey bees are his messengers." But when he goes on to say, "It is probably with reference to his phallic attributes that he has the title of *Eni-duru*—the erect personage" (which Dennett copies from him)—he is certainly in error; for the correct translation of this term is "hard person" (a possible reference to his severe administration of justice!). *Eni*="person," *duru* (always, and only) means "hard" or "difficult." Ellis confounds this latter word with *duro*, which means "to stand," chiefly in the sense of halting or waiting, *e.g.* *duro de mi*="wait for me."

The first and chief significance of *Orishako* is fertility of the earth. He is the harvest-god, and is worshipped at the new moon. His annual "harvest festival" is at the season when the new yams are ripe. This is a season of rejoicing, and public processions and dancing take place in the streets, when, it is true, also that there is a great deal of open shameless immorality. The priestesses, as brides of the orisha, are allowed free licence according to their own fancy; but they are not common property, as Ellis seems to state, and any man who insulted one of them would do so at his peril. The lower classes of people would at this season take advantage of the licence allowed, both at this festival and also that of the other farm-god, *Oko*. It is not necessary to detail, as some other writers have done, the abominations of the heathen in these semi-religious rites. The infamy of heathendom branded on its face by the apostle Paul in the first chapter of his

Epistle to the Romans, is abundantly exhibited at certain times in Yoruba-land. Two things may be thankfully noted here: first, that apart from these festivals a strict morality is generally enforced and practised; secondly, that through Christian influence, and now the rapid advance of European civilisation, a great restraint is being exercised in these matters.

Shopono.—This god is called by Ellis, who is again followed by Dennett, "Shankpanna," but the name is *Shopono* (pronounced "shaw-paw-naw.") He is the disease smallpox personified, and is one of the group of orishas which sprang from the body of Yemaja. There is, however, a myth showing him to be of human origin.[1] Colonel Ellis tells us in his *Ewe-speaking Peoples*[2] that the god of smallpox is by them called *Sopoton*; from which it appears possible that this cult was introduced from Dahomey, as Shango was from the Niger. The name is possibly derived from *shon* ("to take by small quantities"—a reference to the nature of the skin eruption), *pa* ("to kill"), *enia* ("a person"), the three words being contracted to *Shopono*, *i.e.* "He who kills people by littles." He is sometimes said to have, as his companion and attendant, *Buku*, who strangles those who are attacked. Ellis gives a very good description of him:

> Shankpanna [*sic*] is old and lame and is depicted as limping along with the aid of a stick. According to a myth, he has a wooden leg. One day, when all the gods were assembled at the palace of Obatala and were dancing and making merry, Shankpanna endeavoured to join in the dance; but owing to his deformity, stumbled and fell. All the gods and goddesses thereupon burst out laughing, and Shankpanna in revenge strove to infect them with smallpox, but Obatala came to the rescue, and, seizing his spear, drove Shankpanna away. From

[1] Dennett, R. E., *Nigerian Studies*, p. 231. [2] *Op. cit.* p. 52.

that day Shankpanna was forbidden to associate with the other gods, and he became an outcast, who has since lived in desolate and uninhabited tracts of the country.

Consequently we find that shrines and temples dedicated to him are always away in the "bush," and at some distance from the town, or hamlet, so as to keep him away from the human abodes. There is also probably the additional motive, that the priests of this god are glad to have secret, sheltered places wherein to work out their evil purposes. The disease, or the "god," is greatly dreaded and when an outbreak occurs these priests claim the property of all who die from the complaint. Their god has claimed the sufferer and all his possessions. The people are so terrified that they will accept any terms, and pay almost any fine that the priests impose upon them as the price of their mediation to induce the god to stay his afflicting hand. These priests make it their business to spread the disease. The following materials can be found in the house of every priest, or priestess, as emblems of the presence of this god, and (may we not say?) as stock-in-trade for spreading the disease. A calabash containing some portion of the body of a victim of the disease, a pot of black liquid made with water from the body of such victim, a vessel of black powder

God of Smallpox.

compounded with dried scabs, etc., from a sufferer. This liquid, or the powder, is thrown at night into the entrance of dwellings of prospective victims.[1] The emblem is a roughly carved stick as shown in the accompanying illustration copied from one in the writer's possession. It is of hard wood, in length 10 inches and about $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter. It is purposely made in a rough fashion.

Ibeji.—Another prominent orisha is that of the "Twin-gods," *Ibeji* (from *ibi*="birth," *eji*="two"). It is remarkable that, in different parts of the country the birth of twins is regarded, and treated, from opposite points of view. In the eastern part of Yoruba-land, *i.e.* the district of *Ondo*, and throughout the adjoining territory of the Niger Delta, it has always been demanded that twins should be put to death as soon as possible after birth. Dr. Nassau says, "in the Gaboon country where they are welcomed it is nevertheless considered necessary to have special ceremonies performed for the safety of their lives, or if they die, to prevent further evil." In central and western Yoruba-land, *e.g.* Ibadan, Abeokuta, etc., such children are honoured, and accorded a certain degree of worship in their lifetime. Should one of them die, the mother has a wooden image made to represent it, and carries this about with her, washing and dressing it, even as the living child. The elder of twins always has the name *Taiwo* (*to-aiye-wo*="to taste the world") as being the first to taste the world; the younger is always called *Kainde* (*Kehin-de*—"To come behind"). The orisha *Ibeji* is of course the tutelary deity of such children. There is a black species of monkey, which dwells chiefly in mangrove bushes or near the sea and is very agile. It is sacred to this deity, and, although not

[1] "Adesola"—*Nigerian Chronicle*, February 25, 1910.

itself an orisha, may have offerings of fruit made to it. It is *ewo* (taboo) to twins and their parents, who therefore may not kill it, or eat its flesh. Its name is *Edun Dudu*, or *Edun oriokun, i.e.* " black twin," or " sea-side twin " (Bp. Crowther). There is a notable temple to Ibeji at a place called *Erupo*, situate on the lagoon between Lagos and Badagry. All twins and parents of twins are supposed to make at least one pilgrimage to this shrine. Some of them come from a great distance to do so. The accompanying photograph [1] is taken from images of the Twin-gods given to the writer, by a woman who had worshipped them until her conversion to Christianity.

Obalofon is described as the " god of the peace of the kingdom." Although not so well known as some of the others, he is the possessor of considerable power. He is the only deity to which a human sacrifice was *publicly* offered during the period of the writer's sojourn in Abeokuta. Of this sacrifice an account is given in the chapter on " Worship."

[1] See Frontispiece.

CHAPTER V

THE OBJECTS OF BELIEF. THE ORISHAS (*continued*)

AMONG gods of somewhat less importance than those already described, the following may be noticed:

Oke.—*Oke* ("mountain") is the "god of the hills," and is worshipped by dwellers in rocky, or hilly country. He is feared because (if neglected) he is credited with rolling down rocks on the dwellings of those who have not been giving him worship and sacrifices. Should a severe landslip occur, this is equivalent to a demand for human sacrifice. The fall of a boulder is a sure sign that he is needing some attention or gift. His emblem is a stone, or fragment of rock. The most notable of his shrines is the sacred rock, *Olumo*, in Abeokuta. It contains a big cave wherein early refugees from the slave-raiders found a shelter, and around which, as their numbers increased, they built dwellings and formed new townships. The name *Olumo* (*Oluwa mo o*) signifies "The Lord built it." *Abeokuta* means "under-the-rock," this name being given because of the town's position. There is a tradition that, if ever the Egbas (*i.e.* natives of Abeokuta) should be defeated in war they could retire into this cave, which would automatically close and keep them safe until all danger was past. Oke is regarded as the tutelary deity of the town of Ibadan, which is built on two hills. He

is a farm-god, secondary to Orishako, and similar orgies used to be practised at the annual festival of each of these.

Oshosi. — *Oshosi,* another child of Yemaja, is, as already mentioned, a secondary deity of hunters. He is a brother of Ogun, but seems to be exclusively a god of the chase. He dwells in the forest and aids hunters by driving the game into their pitfalls and snares. He also protects his devotees from being injured by beasts of prey. He is represented in human form, armed with a bow.

Aje-Shaluga. — This deity is the god of wealth, although Eshu (the devil, who is not an orisha) would seem to dispute that position with him. Bishop Crowther gives us the proverb, " *Aje-Shaluga* often passes by the first caravan (or person) as it comes to market, and loads the last with blessings," *i.e.* " the race is not always to the swift." [1] Another proverb says, " He who when walking finds a cowrie is favoured by *Aje-Shaluga.*" Probably it would be more correct to describe him as the " god of good luck." The large cowrie is his emblem.

The word *aje* (high intonation), meaning " money," is not to be confounded (as by Dennett) with *aje,* " witchcraft," nor with *aje* (middle intonation) which signifies " trial by ordeal of water." *Aje-Shaluga,* like Oke and Orishako, is a farm-god. He is also the god of colour. As the staple dye of the country is produced from the indigo plant and the highly valued purple *alari* dye is also a vegetable product, it is easy to see why he is a farm-god.

Dada is the god of vegetables, and also of new-born children. He is reputed to be the first-born of the thirteen orishas who came from the body of Yemaja. He is, then, " the god of natural production " (Ellis). He is represented by a calabash ornamented with cowrie-shells, and surmounted with a ball of indigo.

[1] *Grammar and Vocabulary,* p. 21.

We notice now a group of water-deities, all more or less local:

Olokun.—*Okun* is "sea," or "ocean," and *Olokun* is therefore "Owner (or lord) of the sea." Therefore his worship is seldom found, except on, or near, the coast. He is the god of fishermen and all who "go down to the sea . . . and do business in the great waters," although the Africans have no sea-going ships, but only canoes for coastwise work, which they handle with the greatest dexterity, and in which the fishermen venture far out to sea, sometimes even out of sight of land. There is always a more or less heavy "surf" along the West Coast, and nothing of the nature of a harbour for over 1000 miles between Sierra Leone and Lagos; consequently landing through the surf is always an exciting experience, and not infrequently highly dangerous. *Olokun* is not the sea itself, regarded as a god, but its presiding deity. He is supposed to be of human form, black in colour, and with long flowing hair. He is not solitary, but dwells in his palace beneath the waters, attended by a multitude of lesser spirits of the sea, some in human shape, others fish-like. When rough seas are experienced and the surf is bad, "Olokun is angry" and must be appeased by sacrifices, usually animals; but in prolonged rough weather human sacrifices have been offered. Evidences of these, even after the British Government was established in Lagos, have been found in that colony, victims being kidnapped, beheaded, and thrown into the surf at night, by people of the Isaleko quarter.

Various mythical stories are current concerning Olokun. Ellis gives an interesting one—another of the several Deluge stories (which a well-known writer has said are "not to be found in Africa")—as follows:

"Olokun, being enraged with mankind because of

their neglect of him, endeavoured to destroy all of them, by overflowing the land.[1] He had destroyed large numbers when Obatala interfered to save the remainder, forced Olokun back to his palace, and bound him in seven iron chains until he promised to abandon his design."

The entrance to the lagoon at Lagos (the seaport of Yoruba-land) being partially closed by a bar of sand (on which many vessels have been wrecked) is credited with having its own deity, a goddess named *Olokun-su*, or *Elusu*, she being a wife of Olokun. Unlike her husband she is white in colour, and, although of human shape, is covered from her breasts to the hips with fish-scales. The fish of the bar are sacred to her, so that if any luckless fishermen invade her domain she upsets their canoes and drowns them. She is supposed to dwell in the bar. As the bar (which formerly was covered with water to a depth of ten feet or so, where the channel was deepest) has now been dredged to allow deep-sea liners to enter the lagoon, it would be interesting to know what has become of the goddess! Other wives of Olokun are Olosa, the lagoon-goddess, and the river Sapoba.

Olosa.—Lagos is an island situated in a lagoon, which is part of a network of waters, extending east and west for hundreds of miles, parallel with the ocean. The lagoon (in Yoruba *osa*, pronounced "aw-sah") is presided over by the goddess *Olosa* ("owner of the lagoon"), who, like Olokun, is a child of Yemaja. . . . Yemaja, we have seen, is goddess of waters generally, and especially of the river Ogun, so that, as its waters flow into the lagoon, and on into the ocean, the maternal deity is ministering to her offspring. *Olosa* is not only the sister, but also the chief wife of Olokun. Like her husband, she has

[1] "The fountains of the great deep were broken up."—Genesis vii. 11.

long hair. Unlike her sister of the harbour-bar, instead of keeping the fish as her own, she supplies them to her worshippers, and is therefore pre-eminently a fisherman's deity. Temples in her honour are placed along the shores of the lagoon, where offerings of fowls, sheep, etc., are laid down. As these are devoured by crocodiles, those reptiles are called her messengers, and are supposed to convey to her the sacrifices, which they consume, just as in the case of sacrifices inland the vultures which devour them are regarded as *eiye orisha*, " the orisha's birds." Certain crocodiles, distinguished by particular marks, are specially venerated and are accommodated with sheds, purposely erected for them, and covered with roofs thatched with palm leaves, or grass. Offerings of food are made to them every fifth day (Yoruba reckoning, which counts both the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem :* European reckoning would be " every four days "). Ellis says, " many of them become sufficiently tame to come for the offering as soon as they see, or hear, the worshippers gathering on the bank." These must be exceptions. The writer's experience is that both in the lagoon and in the rivers these creatures are extremely timid, and even when devouring food on a sandbank, forsake it and slip back into the water the moment a canoe appears.

Oya.—This goddess has been mentioned as the favourite and most faithful wife of Shango. Her name is the same as that of the great river Niger, except that it is usual in the case of the latter to prefix the word *Odo*, so that *Odo-Oya* is " the River of Oya." It has been suggested that on the death of her husband she went north and wept so copiously that her tears formed the original source of the river ! She has a messenger, *Ofefe* (probably the same as Afefe, " a gentle breeze "). At Lokoro, near to Port Novo, there is a temple dedicated to Oya, the

A MANGROVE SWAMP.

ORO WORSHIP.

facing p. 64.

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image of which has eight heads surrounding the chief head. This doubtless represents the splitting up of the river to form its Delta, before flowing into the ocean.

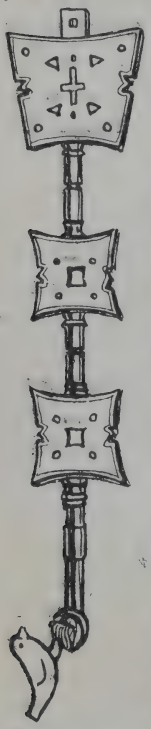
Oshun.—The second of Shango's three river-wives is *Osun* (pronounced "Aw-shung"). This river, rising in the Ijesha country, flows from the north, to the eastward of Ibadan into the lagoon. As in the case of Olosa, the lagoon goddess, Oshun likewise has sacred crocodiles bearing special marks. Curiously enough, although this river is distant from Abeokuta, many of the Egbas worship Oshun, and may be seen wearing her distinctive necklace of transparent amber-coloured beads.

Oba has already been mentioned as the third wife of Shango. She is goddess of the river which bears her name, flowing eastward of Ibadan towards the lagoon.

Aroni.—This god is a wood-sprite. Bishop Crowther calls him "a fairy, an elf supposed to have but one leg." He is also reported to have the head and the tail of a dog, but otherwise to be of human form. His dominion is the forest, and he seizes all whom he meets. Those who endeavour to flee from him he devours; but he loves courageous persons, and, if a man faces him boldly, he leads him to his abode in the thickest fastnesses of the forest, and entertains him as his guest for several months, during which time he initiates him into the secrets of the various plants, and teaches him their medicinal uses. When his student has learned all there is to be learned, Aroni gives him a hair of his own tail as his diploma in proof of his graduation in this school of medicine, and sends him back to the haunts of men. The murmuring of the wind through the trees and the whirling of dead leaves by the breeze are tokens of the presence and energy of this deity.

Aja is the goddess of a similar character to Aroni,

but more beneficent. She also carries persons off into the depths of the forest, and gives them a course of instruction in the medicinal value of herbs; but, unlike her professional brother, she never harms anyone. Bishop Crowther describes her as "a fairy, said to be of diminutive form, who carries persons into the wilderness and instructs them in magic and all kinds of medicines."



Chief's Staff, showing Bird of Osanyin.

Oye is the god of the "Harmattan," a dry sirocco wind, which comes down from the Sahara each morning at a certain season of the year, bearing a very fine dust, which appears as a mist until the wind dies away, when the dust settles on everything and intense heat follows. This god is supposed to live in a cave to the north of Ilorin, though some say that he dwells on the mountain Igbeti, where Elegba (or Eshu) is supposed to have his habitation.

Oshumare.—This deity is the rainbow, and is supposed to be a great snake, dwelling within the earth, who comes up at times to drink water from the sky. A variety of python, called *ere*, is said to be his messenger, and so is sacred to him. Ellis tells us that this god is also sacred to the Ewe-speaking tribes of Dahomey, by whom he is called *Anyiewo*.

Osanyin is the god of medicine, *i.e.* remedial physic. He is applied to in cases of sickness, so that his worship is very general. His figure is that of a bird placed on an iron bar. The chiefs have generally several staves, of ornamental metal. These are sent by the hands of messengers to show their

authority. If a chief wished for the aid of the writer in a case of sickness, he would send a trusted messenger bearing one of these staves, and sometimes the staff would be one which bore the figure of the bird as mentioned above. The illustration is from a photograph of a metal staff actually sent on such an occasion.

Olarosa is the tutelary deity of houses. He is represented by a stick, or sword, and his special duty is to drive away those who practise witchcraft and all kinds of evil spirits; and particularly to keep Eshu from entering in.

Olori-Merin.—The meaning of this name is "the owner of four heads." The figure is regarded as the protector of towns, and may be represented merely by a hillock or artificial mound. A sacrifice used to be offered to it every three months of a new-born child only three or four days old. The mother had to be present, while its throat was cut by a priest, who caught its blood in a calabash and placed it on the top of the mound. The body was cut into small pieces and buried in the mound (Ellis). The time of this cruel sacrifice was well named *Eje-odun* ("Season of blood"). The four heads watched the four points of the compass or "four winds," from the top of the mound, and so preserved the town from pestilence and from war. The figure had the feet and legs of a goat, and was supposed sometimes to appear at night in the form of a serpent. Dennett rightly points out that Olori-Merin is "not in itself an orisha, but merely a Juju (or 'Fetich'), representing the four great orishas," giving as his authority the Babalawo *Olitiyan*.

CHAPTER VI

THE OBJECTS OF BELIEF. (C) THE SPIRITS OF THE DEAD

AMONG the Yorubas, as generally among the West African negro tribes, there are several forms of spirit-worship, which are all totally distinct from orisha-worship. This has not been sufficiently recognised by former writers and considerable confusion has resulted; *e.g.* Dennett says, "Iro, Oro, Egun, Egungun, and Eleko,[1] are all now orishas representing the spirits of their ancestors,"—whereas, as a matter of fact, *none* of them is an orisha.

All the forms of worship comprised under this heading are concerned only with the "ghosts," or departed spirits, of human beings. Repeated inquiries by the writer have all elicited the reply that *none* of them is an orisha.

All these forms are kept strictly secret from the women. When the writer was in the country, any woman known to have discovered the secret of the worship of Oro, Egungun, or Eluku, was put to death without mercy. For this reason, no missionary dared to publish any particulars of these things. It is only since British government was instituted through the whole area, that it has become safe to publish them. Each form, or cult,

[1] *Nigerian Studies*, p. 28. "Eleko" is a mistake for *Eluku*.

is connected with a particular secret society, and the chief forms, as *Oro* in Abeokuta, *Egungun* in Ibadan, *Eluku* in Ijebu, are connected with the executive government of the country. Besides having this influence in the political sphere, they also exercise their office in the social circle, when death enters the family, and through their office not only is the body of the deceased interred, but his spirit is supposed to be escorted safely to the abode of the dead, and in this connection we find the worship of ancestors, to a limited extent.

Oro.—The supreme power in the worship of the spirits of the dead is *Oro*, especially among the Egbas, whose capital is Abeokuta. As in the case of many orishas, various conjectures have been made as to the meaning of the name. The simplest solution is the best, viz. : that the term is onomatopœic. The origin of this cult is obscure. There are, of course, certain myths which are offered to the curious for their acceptance ; but none of them is worthy of much credence. The simplest explanation, and perhaps the most reliable, is that the Hausa people used the " bull-roarer " to scare the birds away from their farms, and the ingenious Yoruba adopted it as a form of spirit-worship. But it is, however, remarkable that we find this instrument used in connection with spirit-worship in various countries of the world ; [1] but probably it is nowhere in such constant use as among the Egbas of Abeokuta, where it is heard on most nights of the year. The instrument as used by the Yorubas is a wooden lath varying in size from 6 inches in length by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch broad to 2 feet 6 inches in length by 4 inches in breadth. The larger sizes are generally

[1] Dr. Andrew Lang, in *Custom and Myth*, tells us it was used in Ancient Greece, and that it is so used in Australia, New Mexico, New Zealand and South Africa.

somewhat oval in form, and slightly rounded on one side, while nearly flat on the other. The edges are not serrated, nor (as a rule) are there any special marks, or designs, engraved on it, as in the case of the *churinga* of the Australian aborigines. The lath is perforated at one end, through which a string is passed, varying in length from 6 feet up to 10 yards. In the case of the small and the medium-sized lath, or "Oro-stick," the cord is attached at the other end to a somewhat flexible rod, or wand, 6 feet or more in length, so that the instrument is raised in the air when in use. The cord of the large powerful ones is attached, at the end remote from the lath, to a ball of cloth, grass or string, which is held in the hands of the operator. The small instrument is called *Ise* (*i.e.* "trouble") and the large one *Agbe* (*i.e.* "a sword"), signifying the "trouble" which Oro brings to evil-doers, and the "sword" wherewith he beheads criminals. The small instrument gives a high, shrill note; but the pitch can be made to vary greatly according to the speed at which it is made to revolve round the operator. The length of the cord also affects the pitch—the bigger the circle described, the deeper is the tone produced. It is impossible to realise, without having experienced it, how intensely weird and awe-inspiring a thing it is, to lie awake in the stillness of the night and to hear the deep booming of a full-sized "bull-roarer" drawing nearer, until at last the noise is deafening in intensity, and the air above and around one's dwelling seem to be full of the agonised cries of a host of doomed spirits. While the small instrument can be played by small boys, and in the present day is in some parts even so used as a toy, the whole strength of a most powerful and experienced man is required to swing the full-sized one. The writer has seen such a player, bent double,

the sweat pouring off him, as he, describing a huge circle of which he was the centre, kept his body rotating by moving his feet with dancing steps, while he kept the "Oro" revolving round him about 2 feet off the ground. It is possible to swing the instrument without producing any audible sound. The secret of producing the note is that the lath must rotate on its own axis at the same time that it is revolving in a circle. This is effected by getting a twist on the string, which, once started, will be maintained automatically. The Oro-stick is correctly swung "clockwise," never (by a Yoruba) anti-clockwise. There is no warrant for the suggestion of Colonel Ellis that Oro-worship is of a phallic nature, or that the instrument itself is a representation of this. Although Dennett follows the colonel in this opinion, he admits that repeated inquiries on this point produced indignant denials from natives of the country. These writers jump to their conclusion from the fact that among certain other tribes (distinctly lower in the scale of civilisation) of West Africa, initiation of youths into similar societies is connected with their arrival at the age of puberty. But the Yorubas are distinctly higher, both intellectually and morally, than the surrounding nations, and (while it must be admitted that in certain cults the grosser side of heathenism is painfully evident) it is unjust, unfair, unnecessary, and unscientific to impute to them a degree of degeneration to which other tribes have fallen, but of which they themselves deny the experience.

The Power of Oro.—While Oro may be played by a person of the male sex, of any age, at such times as he is allowed to be "out," the name strictly belongs to a most powerful secret society, which is the executive government of the Egbas. The seat of government is in Abeokuta, of which the head is the *Alake*, or King, next to

whom are three chiefs: the *Nlado*, or "head civil-chief," the *Jaguna*, or head "war-chief" and executioner, and the *Mogeje*, or "heir." The council, or senate, is known as the *Ogboni*, or "elders." These sit in council on all matters connected with the welfare of the town, and judge serious cases of misdemeanour. Their session is accompanied by spirit-drinking and by drumming—the "Ogboni drum." When the members of the council are coming out into the street, the "Ogboni" note is sounded, and a loud-voiced crier proclaims a warning, "He-e-e-pa! Ogboni!" whereupon all uninitiated men, and all women, flee into the compounds, for if they encountered the Ogboni they would be punished by beating, or fine, and sometimes (in olden times) even by death. The Ogboni council is closely connected with Oro. If its members are judging a criminal case and decide that the culprit is to be condemned to death, he is "handed over to Oro." If members of the Oro-guild are present, the note of the Ogboni-drum is then and there changed to that of the Oro-drum, and the warning is given, "*He-pa! O-o-o-ro!*" All women must instantly flee into the houses, for none may see Oro, under pain of death. Sufficient time having been given for the women to hide, the Oro-party comes out, playing its instrument, and goes to the house of the condemned person to arrest him. He is then led out into the bush, to be put to death, which is said to be often after terrible torture. There are certain groves sacred to Oro. No uninitiated person may enter these, under pain of death. The execution of the criminal takes place within one of these groves by beheading. The fate of the criminal is published to the world, as a warning to evil-doers, by his head being nailed to a tree in a market-place, or some other public position—this is done at night, when none but the Oro-party see

VICTIMS OF ORO.

facing p. 72.

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the transaction. Or, he is "carried off by Oro," both body and soul, and neither the living man nor his lifeless corpse is ever seen again; but his clothes, or part of them, may be seen in a tree, where they have been torn from him as Oro carried him away through the air. This punishment is spiritual, as well as physical, for it is believed that the spirit of a dead person cannot get safely to the realms of the departed, until the corpse is buried with due rites. Those who are thus punished become *Eru-Oro, i.e.* "slaves of Oro," perpetually restless spirits.

Oro may also be employed as an instrument of banishment. If it is deemed necessary to expel some "undesirable" from the country and the way is not easy, the authorities put the matter into the hands of Oro. An "Oro confinement" is proclaimed for a stated period. During the time that it prevails, the Oro parties surround the house of the individual and play their instruments, perhaps giving out also weird cries. They then conduct him away to the bush and "his (?) voice" is heard, far off from the town. He is never seen again and is said to be "banished by Oro"; *nwon fi Oro le e nilu; i.e.* "They with Oro drive him from the town."

As a general rule, Oro may come out any night, between sunset and sunrise. For this reason, women dare not venture out of doors in Abeokuta,[1] except in daylight. During the day he may only come out in emergencies, as noted above, to arrest any special criminal, or when a "confinement" has been officially proclaimed. Twice during the writer's sojourn in Abeokuta a "nine-days' confinement" was ordered. Every house, that had any window looking on to the street, had to have every such window covered by mats, and the door of every house, or compound, had to be kept

[1] The rule is not so strict in other parts of the country.

closed; for no woman (under pain of death) might be seen from the street, or be able to see into the street. When the writer had left the town, during one of these confinements, for a journey to the further interior, his child (under a year old) was taken by the senior missionary into the street to "see Oro!" The Oro party surrounded him and with the greatest concern demanded, "*Okonrin ni, tabi obirin?*" *i.e.* "Is it man or woman?" "What does it matter?" said the missionary, "it is only a baby, under a year old, and cannot take any notice, or remember what is said!" "Oh; but we *must* know. If a woman, it must die." "Ah, well, do not distress yourselves, for it is a man!" "*O dara!* ('It is good') now we are satisfied, and he may see Oro, since he is a man!" Any woman who saw Oro played, or confessed that she knew how the noise was produced, was in the olden days put to death without mercy. But, if she saw the Oro-stick lying in a house, and, on being asked what it was, replied, "Only a bit of wood; it is nothing more," she would probably escape. These lengthy confinements were generally ordered when specially evil deeds were to be done. After they were concluded, dead bodies would be found in the bush, victims of human sacrifice (not publicly offered), or objects of the vengeance of (probably) some person, or persons, in authority. They were also used in past years to provide an opportunity of sending away slave-caravans, consisting of townspeople who had been kidnapped by the marauding bands (or "war-boys") of the chiefs of the town. The so-called "inter-tribal wars" were kept up continually as an excuse for this kidnapping, and frequently chiefs set their war-boys to kidnap the people of their own town whom they were in office to protect. On one occasion a man from a neighbouring township, who had been thus kidnapped

and escaped, complained to the chief. Several chiefs were sitting in council when this man's case was heard. "Who is the man who caused you to be caught?" he was asked. "I do not know him," he replied, "but they call him M——" The man thus named was one of those hearing his case! His fellow-chiefs smiled slightly, but no reply was made. On one occasion, this same chief had a large number of such captives shut up waiting for an opportunity to sell them into slavery to another tribe (their reputed enemies), when a great fire broke out, and his premises were threatened. His servants begged him to allow these victims to be brought out; but he refused, and caused them all to perish, in order that not one should escape to testify against him. During these confinements men are to be seen playing the Oro-stick (or "bull-roarer") all over the town, many of them being more or less drunk, and in addition to this the Oro-king [1] and his wife (both being men) come out in state. It will be seen from the accompanying photograph that, although they wear wooden masks, etc., the whole person is not concealed, thus differing from the *Eguns*, to be described shortly.

After the death of any important person very much "Oro" is heard at night, and after such a visit, or after an "Oro confinement," one or more trees will be seen, from which all the branches have been cut off, and at the top of the tree a white flag, or cloth, has been placed. In cases of special importance the cloth is stretched from the top of one tree to the top of another near at hand. Sometimes other articles, such as mats, gin bottles, or demijohns, or old clothes, are seen fastened to the stumps of the branches. This is called the ceremony of *Oro*

[1] The highest functionary of Oro in Abeokuta is the *Ologbo* of *Ijeun*. *Ologbo* signifies "cat." See the illustration, p. 64.

pagi, or *Oro jegi* ("Oro kills the tree," or "Oro eats the tree"). Every leaf and every young shoot has entirely disappeared from the tree. These are supposed to have been entirely eaten up by the spirit of the recently deceased person, who has now become deified. This ceremony always takes place at night, and is never allowed to be seen by any person who has not been initiated as a member of the secret society of Oro. A proverb says, *A ki ri ajeku Oro : i.e.* "No one ever sees that which is devoured by Oro." [1] Other ceremonies connected with Oro-worship are (1) *Igba Irana*, a calabash ceremony to get a troublesome spirit (*manes*) out of a dwelling-house, and (2) the *Ipade* ceremony (originally connected specially with hunters) to remove the spirit, whose worn-out garments, cap, etc., are removed to a place outside the town, a clay figure of the deceased sometimes being set up with them.[2]

Egungun, which is pronounced "Eh-gung-gung," and frequently contracted into *Egun*, signifies "bone," or "skeleton." An *egun* is supposed to be the spirit of a deceased person, who has returned to earth. It is absolutely essential that not a single particle of the human form should be visible ; for, if this rule is broken, the man wearing the dress must die (presumably as being an impostor !), and every woman present must likewise die. In some parts of the country the dress may be made of grass, and a wooden mask worn. This is the case in the Benin country, where there is a similar performance called *Ovia*. In the Niger Delta, these

[1] Colonel Ellis says that the rock *Olumo* in Abeokuta is "sacred to Oro and none may ascend it." It is true that much Oro-worship takes place on this rock ; but the statement that none may ascend it is not correct. The Colonel was never in Abeokuta ; but the writer lived there and has ascended and crossed over the said rock.

[2] "Adesola," *Nigerian Chronicle*, Vol. I. Nos. 40–42 (August–September, 1909).

EGUNS IN ABEOKUTA.

facing p. 76.

figures are called *Maws*, and are generally entirely swathed in mats. But, as will be seen from the accompanying photo, taken by the writer in Abeokuta, in that town, and in Yoruba-land generally, the dress is made entirely of native cotton cloth, and made up into one garment including the headpiece, which has perforations in the face, or veil, through which the man within can see out. An Egun invariably carries a whip, or long flexible wand, with which he drives people away. Eguns may come out freely in the daytime, and do so singly, or in small companies. They walk, leap, dance in grotesque fashion, and run after people and frighten them. They are generally attended by one or more followers, in ordinary human form. The Egun sometimes utters strange cries, and invariably talks a great deal, but his speech is always in "Egun-voice," which is of a deep ventriloquial tone. In all his antics, the Egun has to be extremely careful not to touch any other person. Should he do so ever so slightly (*e.g.* if the wind caused his garment to barely touch the garment of any ordinary man, woman, or child) he would be put to death, together with the person (man or woman) whom he touched, or by whom he was touched, and so also would every woman present. The same penalty would be inflicted on him, if any accident to his dress during his "dancing" revealed any portion of his body, while any woman was present. The extreme jealousy with which the secret, that the "spirit" was only a man dressed up, was guarded is shown by the following two incidents :

On one occasion an Egun who was dancing in Abeokuta in the presence of a crowd, which contained a large number of women, had the misfortune to tear his clothes. He was killed, and every woman present was taken and also put to death. The horror produced

by this event was so great that Egun-worship was never again permitted in the particular township where it occurred.

At another time, when the seaport of Lagos alone was a British colony, and the rest of the country entirely under native government, two Eguns were dancing in the streets of Lagos, and some trouble occurred for which they were arrested and brought into the court. The presiding magistrate insisted that they should uncover their heads and show their faces. Among the spectators in the court were two girls from Abeokuta, who, when they returned home, told their brother, "We are no longer afraid of the Eguns, for we have seen and learned what they are," stating how they had made the discovery. The brother (possibly fearing for his own safety if it were discovered that he knew and did not report this) informed the chiefs and the two girls were put to death.

The Egun-dance, however, is regarded as a piece of fun and is greatly enjoyed, certainly by the men. These "spirits," having frightened the market women from their stalls, help themselves (in their own persons, or through their followers) to the commodities exposed for sale. They do not resent questioning, or even a moderate amount of "chaff"; but no disrespect must be shown to them by, or in the presence of, women. One morning the late Rev. T. Harding was passing through a certain township and encountered an Egun, who was entertaining the crowd. He saluted the "spirit," *E ku owuro o. o ji re?* *i.e.* "Good morning! Do you wake well?" The Egun fell into the trap; giving the customary reply, *A dupe*, *i.e.* "We give thanks!" The missionary, with a smile, said to the people, "Spirits do not sleep!" Missionaries have always to act tactfully, striking the happy mean

between needlessly offending the people on the one hand, and countenancing false beliefs on the other, so that while treating the Eguns with courtesy, as any other person, and avoiding anything that might endanger the life of any one, it was essential to avoid any appearance of fear of these beings. Late one afternoon, shortly before sunset, as the writer and his wife were coming along a narrow road, with a wall on the right hand, and a bank of earth on the left, they met an Egun, behaving in a very blustering manner. They were within 100 yards or so of their mission house, from the verandah of which two of the native maids were looking on. These exclaimed in terror, "Oh! Missis will be killed." It was necessary to go on, or turn back (as if in fear) and endeavour to reach home by a long detour. The writer said, "Show no fear. We will go straight on; but be careful not to touch him. He will give way to us." When the respective parties were within about two yards of each other, the Egun gracefully sat down on the bank, at the left hand. The writer thanked him and gave him a courteous salutation to which he as courteously (but in "Egun-voice") replied. Due care was, of course, taken to allow sufficient space between the clothes of the "spirit" and the *oniwasu*, *i.e.* "missionary."

It will be recognised that while women may look on freely at Egun performances they must be (at least apparently) in complete ignorance of the deceit practised on them. Not only must they not by sight, or touch, prove that the vision is other than a disembodied spirit; they must not even laugh at him, or show him any disrespect, still less say that he is only a man in disguise.

In June of each year the Annual Egun festival is held, for seven days. It is the Yoruba "All Souls" festival, when mourning is repeated for all those who have died

during the last few years. Egungun is specially powerful in Ibadan, even as Oro is in Abeokuta.

Under certain conditions the Egun need not be dressed up ; but this is only when he is quite hidden from view by other circumstances. A curious and uncommon example of this which the writer only once experienced was as follows :

In 1894 the writer and Mrs. Farrow with two single lady missionaries (new recruits to the mission) were stationed at Kudeti, a township in Ibadan. Their mission house was close to the boundary wall of a compound which also contained the houses of a schoolmaster, a catechist, and the Rev. D. Olubi, an elderly native clergyman, who had come to Ibadan from Abeokuta many years previously with the Rev. D. Hinderer. One night, somewhere about midnight, the missionaries were awakened by an awful voice and appalling groans, which came (apparently) from the spot immediately below the windows of the mission house. Their first thought, on awakening, was that some terrible murder must be taking place and an appeal being made for help ; but the writer soon recognised the " Egun-voice " and was able to make out what was said. One of the young recruits confessed next morning that she had been terrified, fearing that a madman had escaped and was trying to force his way into the mission house. This nocturnal visitor was really a " night-Egun," who took up a position under the wall of the mission compound, just outside the mission house, and, pretending that he was the spirit of a man who had been a friend and companion of Mr. Olubi in the days of his heathen condition in Abeokuta, now proceeded to " salute " him, expecting an answer in the way of a present, and ridiculing and chaffing him with having become a Christian for the sake of worldly advantage. This one-sided conversation was as follows : (loudly, in *Egun-*

ADAMU-ORISHA.

SHRINE OF ESHU, THE DEVIL.

facing p. 80.

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voice), "*Olubi—Olubi—Olubi!*" (pause). "*Olubi—E ku atijo!*" (salutation, "after a long absence!"—several times repeated, with pauses, interspersed with frightful groans). "Olubi! I haven't seen you for a long time! Why don't you answer me? You've done a jolly good thing for yourself, haven't you? Fine thing to be an *onigbagbo*" (*i.e.* "a believer"), "isn't it? (Groans, *ad lib.* and pauses.) "Why don't you answer me?" (*i.e.* "Come out and give me a present?") This went on for a considerable space of time, something between half an hour and an hour, until the disappointed and disgusted "spirit," after a final outburst of groans, retired and went back to "spirit-land" (or to his sleeping mat)!

There is in Lagos a similar society to that of the Egungun, called *Adamu-Orisha* (adamu="confusion," "a mistaken view," or "heresy") which seems to denote that this society can confound and overcome the orishas. The dress is not in one piece. It comprises a large gown, sewn native fashion with very long and wide sleeves, a long white veil, and a broad-brimmed hat, also an *Aropale*, a piece of strong cloth to rub the earth with. A special wand (white) is carried which is constructed hollow, with innumerable cross bars within. It is partially filled with seeds, so that, as the wand is turned, or even slightly agitated with either end uppermost, a weird, rustling sound is produced, which, of course, is to be regarded as the voice of "spirits." Some think that this *Adamu-Orisha* is merely a localised form of the *Eluku* of *Ijebu*, described in the following paragraph. It takes the form of a play and its object is to lay the corpse (and thereby the spirit) of a deceased person.

Eluku.—*Eluku* is another secret society connected with spirit-worship, practised to some extent in Abeokuta, but with much less frequency than Oro, or Egungun.

The real home of *Eluku* is the Ijebu country, where it possesses the same executive power as Oro in Abeokuta, and Egun in Oyo and Ibadan ; hence the proverb,

Oyo l'elegun ; Egba l'oloro ; Ijebu l'alagemo.

i.e. " Oyo has the Egun cult ; Egba has the Oro cult ; Ijebu has the Agemo cult "—*Agemo* being a materialised form of Eluku.

The name *Eluku* signifies " You must beat him to death," in reference to its executionary power in punishing criminals. Eluku only comes out at night, and is " heard," but not " seen," except by the initiated ; or by others at their peril. Great secrecy was formerly observed concerning it, and the writer could get very little information concerning this cult. One usually well-informed and accurate inquirer into the religion of his people said that Eluku was " extremely wicked," and so powerful that " even Oro must go in if Eluku comes out." Others say that Eluku must hide from Oro. Certain it is that the two were never both heard at the same time. Eluku announces his presence by a most unearthly shriek somewhat sustained, which is produced by the mouth of a highly-trained performer, some say " by means of a leaf in the mouth," as in the case of the Calabar *Egbo*. It can be heard at a very great distance. The pseudonymous writer, " Adesola," who has written a series of articles on Yoruba burial customs in the *Nigerian Chronicle*, says that " Eluku is the Oro of the Ijebus," that it came from Iraye, and that its presiding spirit, or deity, is descended from the royal house of *Oniloku*, which is the state title of the monarch of Iraye.

The *social* office of Eluku (as of Oro and Egun) is to conduct funeral rites. These are performed on the third, seventh and fourteenth days after the death. The seventh

is the great day. The coffin, with the corpse, or bones, of the deceased, or a bare plank to represent the same, is placed, an hour after sunset, in a well-lighted compound, and the spirit is invoked, and questions asked and answered about him. This chorus is sung:

J'epo l'aiye o!
B'ai jeje l'orun, a ko mo,
Se re l'aiye o!
B'ai sere l'orun, a ko mo.

that is:

Eat richly in this world!
We know not whether there is eating in heaven.
Do well in this world!
We know not whether there is well-doing in heaven.

Sacrifices are offered, the deceased is again invoked, and responds (!) in the loud cries of Eluku. On the fourteenth day his shrine is fixed.

The *political* aspect of Eluku is prominent in the Annual Festival. Late at night his cries are heard and a song sung which is most terrifying, describing the deity in his office of executioner. But he blesses his worshippers in a verse written in dactylic measure, of which the translation is:

My child, my child, long life to thee,
Coupled with health!
A parent thou'lt be
Of living sons and fruitful daughters.

In the Niger Delta district there is a similar society called Egbo,[1] the members of which produced a similar unearthly shriek to that of Eluku by means of a leaf in the mouth. As in the case of Oro and Eluku, women and uninitiated men must keep out of the way of Egbo.

Agemo.—*Agemo* is the materialised form of the Eluku

[1] Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, pp. 121, etc.

spirit of deceased parents or ancestors. The name signifies "able to change form," and so is also the word for "a chameleon." The agemo is properly a circular object, about 3 feet in height, and with a radius of from 18 to 24 inches. It is open at the top; but no inquisitive gaze is permitted, as the figure is entirely surrounded by old men, who are themselves enveloped in mats. It seldom issues out from its own grove. When it does so, it plays and whirls itself about. Even chiefs do obeisance (*dobale*) to it, and women (keeping a great way off) likewise prostrate themselves sideways (*yinrinka*), this being the African curtsey. There is a feathered Agemo, known as the *Oniwuruwuru*.[1]

Abiku.—*Abiku* (from *bi*="to beget," and *ku*="to die") is connected with the death of children who die before reaching the age of puberty. As infant mortality is terribly high, this cult has great influence. The term includes the spirits of those who die in childhood, and, also, the class of evil spirits which causes their death. Only one *abiku* can take possession of a child. He is checked by the jealousy of his fellow-abikus, who only allow him to enter on condition that he shares the child's food, etc., with them. The insatiable demands of these outside spirits cause the emaciation and ultimate death of the child. To guard against this danger, iron rings, waist belts, anklets and wristlets of beads, and other charms are put upon the young children from their earliest days.[2] Should these fail to keep away the abikus, cuts are made in the child's skin, and chillie peppers are rubbed in to torture the evil spirit out of the child. In the event of death being attributed to abiku the body was formerly thrown into the bush, or hacked to pieces to destroy the evil spirit.

[1] *Nigerian Chronicle*, Nos. 31 and 32 (June, 1909).

[2] These charms are seen on the arms of the figures Ibeji (see Frontispiece).

CHAPTER VII

THE OBJECTS OF BELIEF—THE DEVIL

THERE is no orisha, properly so called, that is commonly worshipped by all Yoruba pagans. A man, or woman, may worship one, or any number of such deities, or, in a few cases (as previously mentioned), the individual may worship no orisha; but all, without exception, believe in and pay at least some measure of worship, or reverence, to *Eshu, i.e.* "the devil." Although his worship is general throughout Yoruba-land, it is particularly cultivated in the Ijesha and Ondo districts, and in the Benin country, and the tribes dwelling there have always been noted as the most wicked and cruel of all the Yoruba-speaking peoples. An Ijesha man, well known to the writer, was named *Esu-to-sin, i.e.* "The devil is sufficient to worship."

The name *Eshu* comes from *shu,* "to be (or become) dark," and signifies "darkness," or "the dark one," the "prince of darkness." He is emphatically the supreme evil spirit, and (as such) is not taken into dwelling-houses; but has his shrine in the street. In some form or other, he is represented at the entrance to every town, compound, or house. A proverb says, "*Eshu ko ni iwa; a ko ile re si ita,*" *i.e.* "The devil has no character; (therefore) his house is made for him in the street." Another name by which he is frequently called

is *Elegbara*, or *Elegba*, an ambiguous title, which may mean either "the one who takes the body," or "the one who saves"; probably this name of double meaning is designedly given, so that while the good meaning may please the spirit himself the other may serve to warn mankind. Bishop Crowther in his *Vocabulary* simply gives as its equivalent "Satan, the god of mischief." Ellis describes him as the phallic god of the Yorubas; but this is not strictly correct. Some forms of image made to represent him may appear to support this idea, but he may just as reliably be called the "god of wealth," because his wooden images are always adorned with strings of cowries, and cowries (the native currency) are a constant offering to him (cf. Pluto among the ancient Greeks). He is really the deity of supreme wickedness in all its forms, and another of his titles expresses this, viz. *Buruku*, an intensely emphatic word for "wicked," or "evil"—*buru* (verb)="to be bad," *buburu* (adjective)="bad"; but *buruku* (*buru* and *iku*, "death")="wicked to death." From this it is evident that the worship of Eshu originated from fear. He was regarded as the powerful spirit of evil, ever ready to do mischief, who must be appeased, and made at least non-malevolent towards his devotees. From this, however, it was not a very difficult process to go further and seek to induce him to exercise his great power in behalf of his worshippers. Thus we find that in practice, he is not only offered propitiatory sacrifices, but he is prayed to and offered gifts, to secure his favour in conferring benefits upon those who serve him. So far is this carried that it is sometimes said, "There is a good Eshu and there is a bad Eshu," or "Eshu is not wholly bad," *i.e.* "not so black as he is painted!"

The devil is represented by images of different forms. (1) The correct and chief form appears to be a simple

pillar of mud, slightly conical in form and adorned by three more or less rounded marks, or the insertion of three shells instead. This, if in the open street, will be covered by a small shed thatched with *ikin*, or palm leaves. (2) The household Eshu must be always of mud and in human form. Another form is made of wood and more or less human in form. This is generally in a sitting position, with the hands resting on the knees, but sometimes sitting on its feet with flexed knees. Ellis says, "Elegba . . .

Sketch of a Common Mud Image of Eshu.
This image is normally covered by a rude hut, or at least a roof of thatch.

is always represented naked, seated with his hands on his knees, etc.," but the fact is that he is *not* always so represented. The photograph shown at page 80, taken by the writer, shows him represented by a wooden image, wearing a cloth covering his body, and adorned with strings of cowrie shells. This "devil-shrine" was very near to the mission house. It shows also cowrie shells which have been thrown down as an offering by passers-by. (3) Small wooden images are made to represent this evil deity, to which are attached leather loops, by which they may be carried when the owner is on a journey. Two illustrations

(*a*) Image of Eshu.

are given of such, now in the writer's possession. (*a*) The first figure shows the devil in a kneeling posture, supporting with its hands breasts of a female type. The idea expressed is that this deity gives nourishment. It is to be noted that figures of the devil are always given hair dressed after the fashion of women. (Yoruba men almost invariably shave their heads or are close-cropped.) This might lead to the supposition that Eshu is regarded as a female personage, or that there is a male and a female devil. The truth is, however, that he is regarded as the one and only such being, and is always spoken of as "he"; but this does not preclude him from possessing certain feminine characteristics. (*b*) The second image is a very small one, only 3 inches in height; but is of special interest, on account of the markings engraved upon it. This figure, below the breast, is not of human form, but merges into a square pillar. On its back and two sides is engraved a board precisely similar to a Mohammedan writing tablet (*wala*). This, however, has nothing to do with the Islamic faith, but is the divining board used by the *babalawo*, or Ifa priest, in consulting his deity. Thus it illustrates the connection between

Ifa (the oracle) and Eshu (the prince of darkness), who gave to Ifa the clue, by which he might find out and reveal the dark or hidden things.[1] Again the number of lines on each side is symbolical, as were the cowrie strings which formed the necklace of the image. All numbers have symbolic meanings. Every odd number (except "one") has a bad meaning, and every even number a good one. Now Eshu's numbers are particularly five and seven, usually the latter, and so we find that the image had seven strings

(*b*) Another image of Eshu.

of seven cowries each. The number of lines engraved on the sides are likewise all uneven numbers. This image was formerly placed on a mat at the roadside. Sometimes Eshu is simply represented by a rough stone on which the blood of sacrifices (*e.g.* fowls) is spilt. One such stone is in the writer's possession, and its former owner in giving it up to the writer (on her conversion to Christianity) told him it was dedicated to Eshu and had been so used. Its surface is covered with old blood stains.[2] *Eshu*, in

[1] See p. 37. [2] Shown in the drawing on p. 93.

consequence of the bargain he made with Ifa, receives a portion of the sacrifices offered to the other gods. Some of the blood, at least, is poured out to him (as has been noted in the case of Ogun) before the victim is offered to the particular orisha who is invoked. It is supposed that if he is not thus appeased with the first blood, he will prevent the orisha to whom the sacrifice is offered from accepting the same. This is another indication that Eshu stands apart from the orishas and that he is

The same image of Eshu (*b*), with shells removed to show engravings.

regarded as a being superior to them in cunning and in power. The special victims offered to Eshu for his own sacrifices are cocks, dogs, and he-goats. Ellis says that on "very important occasions a human victim is offered to him." This may have been the case in olden times, but the writer never knew of such being offered to Eshu.

It is said that Eshu's chief place of abode is on a mountain, *Igbeti* by name, supposed to be situated near

the Niger where he has a large palace of brass, and keeps a large number of retainers. His special functions are, as we should expect, the working out of his character. His chief attributes are mischief, cunning and might. As mentioned above, he is worshipped to propitiate and placate him towards the worshipper. His aid is also invoked in behalf of the same worshipper, and this may be for the bestowal of some gift, through his power, or for injury to the worshipper's enemy. Again, because of his cunning and knowledge, he is frequently consulted as to the ordinary affairs of daily life. He can be consulted directly (without the aid of a babalawo) by his worshippers, with the saving of time and expense, and his answers are regarded as infallible. Sixteen cowrie shells are used as the instruments of divination in this case. No Yoruba man or woman, having consulted Eshu, would dare to disregard the answer given by the oracle. A simple sacrifice, comprising at least palm-oil and very cold water, must be offered before the cowrie shells are cast in divination.

CHAPTER VIII

MODES OF WORSHIP

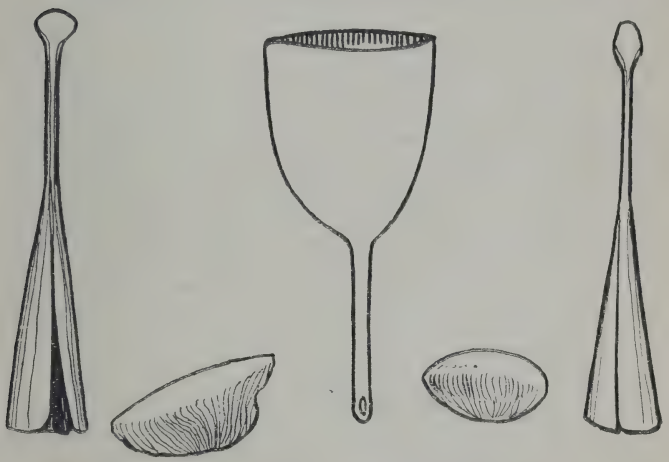
THE pagan Yoruba is a very religious person. He renders worship to his deity, or deities, in various ways, both personally and in communion with others. Three days after birth the new-born child is acknowledged by the father as his own, and Ifa is consulted, through the *babalawo*, and returns answer as to the orisha that the child is to worship, and the *ewos*, or prohibitions, that it is to observe.[1] This orisha then becomes the tutelary god of the child to be worshipped by him throughout his life. Seven days after the birth of a girl, nine days after that of a boy, the babalawo comes again, offers a sacrifice to Ifa and to the *Olori*, or in-dwelling spirit of the child's head (see Chapter X.), sprinkles the child three times with a water of purification and thrice pronounces its name. The fire in the room is extinguished and its embers carried out. Thus we have a purification by sacrifice, water and fire.

Prayer.—The Yoruba heathen well illustrates the desire for God divinely implanted in the human heart. On rising from his sleeping mat in the early morning, he will speak to none and engage in no work until he has

[1] A similar custom is observed in the Gaboon country (Nassau, *Fetichism in West Africa*, p. 78).

first "saluted" his orisha, thanking the god for protection and seeking his blessing for the new day. Thus daily private prayer is practised.

Early one morning, as the writer was travelling up



Articles used in Idol-Worship.

1 and 2 are bells used in the worship of the god Obatala. They are made of sheet metal, bent as shown, and contain clappers.

3 is a Shango bell, made of two sheets of metal, welded together at the edges, thus forming a flattish oval with sharp edges. The bell has no clapper, but is struck by hand.

4. The sacred stone of Shango, very carefully ground, one side being sharpened, as shown.

5. A devil-stone, stained with the blood of numerous sacrifices. The photographer has unfortunately placed this stone upside down, its base being uppermost.

the river Ogun by canoe, he saw a woman come down to the waterside, and salute the river. Entering the water until it covered her feet, she stood and recited prayers, then she advanced until her knees were covered, and, successively, her hips and her body up the arm-

pits, reciting more prayers at each stand. The canoe rounding a bend of the river she was soon lost to view. She was doubtless a worshipper of Yemaja, the goddess of the said river. Each orisha has its own appointed sacred day for worship. It is said that some have a week of five days, and some a week of seventeen days. The Yoruba week is really, according to European reckoning, a week of four days ; but the African includes the first day of the new week and so calls it a week of five days. Each day of this four-day week is called by the name of one of the greater deities, and is sacred to his worship. The usual order is :

Awo (*i.e.* Secret)	= Ifa's Day.
Ogun	= Ogun's Day.
Jakuta	= Shango's Day.
Obatala (or *Orishala*)	= Obatala's Day.

and each of these deities in turn is said to be worshipped " every fifth day." Certain of the lesser deities may be worshipped on the same day as any of the greater ones. When one is said to be worshipped on every " seventeenth " day (*i.e.* every sixteenth according to European reckoning) the significance is that he has one sacred day in every four " weeks."

The ritual of the day includes the offering of the prescribed sacrifices, and often processions, with music and dancing, especially at the great festivals. The dancing is of a slow measured type, generally with symbolical steps, undulations and contortions of the body. The musical instruments are usually drums, bells (of special pattern according to the orisha), and rattles. To the accompaniment of these instruments, native lyrics are sung in praise of the particular deity. Christian lyrics have been written in the same style,

MISSIONARIES' CANOES ON THE RIVER OGUN.

facing p. 94.

chiefly for evangelistic purposes, the poetic style and the accompanying melody being strictly African.[1]

Sacrifice.—The principle of sacrifice has two sides, the negative side of self-denial, and the positive side of offering, or oblation. *Taboo* in its religious aspect is a kind of negative sacrifice, a real denial of self in deference to the wish, or decree, of the deity. The Yoruba term for this is *Ewo* (pronounced "Eh-waw") and it holds a large place in, and exercises absolute sway over, the life of every Yoruba heathen. Three days after birth, the Ifa priest not only declares what orisha is to be worshipped by the new-comer into the world, but also the four *ewos* which he must always observe, viz.: (1) his own orisha (*i.e.*, he is forbidden to marry a woman whose orisha is the same as his own); (2) an animal *ewo*; (3) a vegetable *ewo*; (4) an omen *ewo* (a rat, bird, or snake). These are his personal *ewos*, of which he may never eat. In times of sickness the patient often esteems it more urgent to find out his *ewo* in this disease than to receive the remedy. Then again each orisha has its special *ewos*, *i.e.* things which must never be offered to it in sacrifice, nor be partaken of by its worshippers.

Offerings in sacrifice vary very greatly. Kola-nuts may be offered to every orisha, but in the case of Obatala, to whom everything of a red colour is *ewo* (*i.e.* taboo), only the white (or "bitter") kola may be offered. The ordinary (pink) kola is largely used for purposes of divination, but its chief use is to symbolise friendship, or purification, after a quarrel or dispute. For this purpose the nut is split and partaken of by both (or all) parties concerned. Partaking of the nut in common is a sacred act of communion. To say "we have split the kola" is to say "the dispute is over and we have

[1] See Appendix C, p. 169.

become friends." Offerings of cowrie shells (currency) are constantly made to Eshu (Satan). Practically all kinds of food may be offered in sacrifice, and most kinds of living creatures, from reptiles up to man ; but among birds the vulture (*akala*), the turkey buzzard (*gunugun*), and the grey parrot (*ofe*) are *ewo* to all orishas ; the green parrot (*aganran*), however, *may* be offered. Palm-oil accompanies many sacrifices. Sacrifices are not offered promiscuously, or haphazard. There is a prescribed offering for each special purpose, *e.g.* " against death in sickness—*a sheep* ; for longevity—*a dog* ; for strength to the body—*a ram sheep and a cock* ; against losses—*a basket of eggs*, most of which are usually employed with leaves sacred to Ifa ; against being lied upon [1]—*domestic pigeons* and *palm-nut shells* ; against trouble and misfortune—*rats* (*i.e.* bandicoots) ; against drought—*male crabs*, from which water drops each time one makes a leap ; against a flood from incessant rain, or for confusion of a plot—*snails* ; against a fire-accident—*a wild-hog or a duck*, with different kinds of Ifa leaves ; for victory in time of war—*a ram sheep and an old cock together ;* against the death of a very young child—*a hen that had had chickens ;* to be permitted to come to a title, and for the destruction of a plot—*a wild hog*." [2]

At the offering of a special sacrifice, the priest (*babalawo*) indicates what is required. The worshippers prostrate themselves, saying, *Toto, totohun*, an abbreviation for *Totohun, emi ko se be mo, i.e.* " It is enough ; never will I do so again." The priest intercedes for the worshippers, and points out their humiliation and penitence. He then kills the sacrificial victim and pours out the blood on the ground. In some cases the head and entrails

[1] [*sic*] *i.e.* " slandered."
[2] Bishop James Johnson in *Isin bibo Orisa.*

are exposed before the temple in a shallow earthen vessel. Sometimes in response to the appeal of the priest, an audible answer " from the god ! " is heard in a bird-like chirping, twittering voice. Ellis suggests that this is the work of a hidden confederate with a blade of grass in his mouth ! The carcases of sacrifices are disposed of in various ways. In the *Irapada* (or Redemption Offering) the whole victim is burnt with fire, and, when consumed, the smouldering ashes are quenched with water and then taken out and deposited on a public road, as is the case with all other offerings and gifts to Eshu.[1] Sometimes the victims are taken out of the town alive and " lost " in the bush, being supposed to bear away the sin, guilt and trouble of the offerer which had been transferred to them.[2] Or (with a similar intent) they may be thrown into a river, or the sea (if offered to Olokun) or buried in the earth. Some sacrifices (*e.g.* fowls offered to Ogun by hunters before starting on an expedition) are consumed by the offerers, but the blood must be first poured out. In other cases, the blood of the victim is sprinkled " on the two side posts and on the lintel " and on the door itself of the worshipper's house.[3] Sometimes the carcase of the victim is thrown from priest to priest, from hand to hand, without being allowed to touch the ground.[4] Sometimes the victims (especially young chickens) are taken out to some public road, and left to be devoured alive by beasts or birds of prey. Sometimes, again, the blood of the victim is streaked upon the head of the offerer to signify that he is the one for whom the propitiation is made.[5]

[1] Cf. Israel's " Sin-offering on Day of Atonement."
[2] Cf. Israel's " Scapegoat."
[3] Cf. The Israelite Passover.
[4] Cf. The Israelite " Heave Offering."
[5] Cf. The Israelite Consecration of Priest and of Cleansed Leper (Lev. xiv.).

The supreme sacrifice of the Yorubas is, of course, the *human sacrifice*, but the offering of human victims seems never to have prevailed among the true Yorubas and Egbas to the appalling extent to which it was carried by the allied tribes of Ondo and Benin on the east, and the neighbouring people of Dahomey on the west. This was not (as one writer supposed) because the Yoruba kings had less power than those of the peoples referred to; but was due to the fact that the Egbas and other true Yorubas never (as far as we can trace) sank to such a low level of degradation as the others. The practice did, however, prevail to a considerable extent; but is now, owing to the whole country being under the British Government, strictly forbidden. In olden days there was an annual basket sacrifice in Abeokuta in which the victims, enclosed in baskets, were cast down from a height and despatched by clubs. In times of great urgency special human sacrifices were offered to Shango, Ifa, Ogun, or certain other deities. Such were often offered secretly at night, hence the saying "the night is bad." A human victim used to be offered annually to Elegbara (*i.e.* Eshu, or "Satan") in Ondo, where (as mentioned above) devil-worship is particularly strong. Captain John Adams, writing at the close of the eighteenth century, says of Lagos:

"The horrid custom of impaling alive a young female to propitiate the favour of the goddess presiding over the rainy season, that she may fill the horn of plenty, is practised here annually. The immolation of the victim . . . takes place soon after the vernal equinox, and along with her are sacrificed sheep and goats; which, together with yams, heads of maize and plantains, are hung on stakes on each side of her. Females destined to be thus destroyed are brought up for the express

purpose in the king's, or caboceer's, seraglio, and it is said that their minds have been so powerfully wrought upon by the fetish men, that they proceed to the place of execution with as much cheerfulness as those infatuated Hindoo women who are burnt with their husbands. One was impaled while I was at Lagos, but of course I did not witness the ceremony. I passed by where her lifeless body still remained on the stake a few days afterwards." [1]

The last public human sacrifice in Abeokuta was offered in 1891 to the god Obalofon. Notice was given to the effect that this would take place, because "the babalawos had been warned by the oracle, that, if it were not offered, three disasters would happen, viz.: death among the great chiefs, drought through the failure of the usual rains, and a devastating scourge of locusts." It was remarked that after the sacrifice had been offered each of these calamities did occur. A slave was purchased who was to become the victim, and was kept shut up for a week or ten days before being killed. The writer, with the native catechist of the particular township and other native Christians, went daily to the chiefs and people to endeavour to dissuade them from their contemplated cruelty. The chiefs said, "The people are determined to have it, and we cannot prevent it. *We* do not want it!" The people in the streets and market places said, "*We* do not want it. The chiefs are determined to have it, and we cannot prevent them!" The victim during the days of his incarceration was called by the honourable title *Oluwo*,[2] and was allowed (according to the usual custom) to have every wish of his fully gratified, excepting only liberty and life. On the day

[1] *Sketches taken during Ten Voyages to Africa, between the years* 1786 *and* 1800, pp. 25, 26.

[2] A title given to a ruler of the country.

immediately preceding his death, he was taken in procession round the township, made much of, and allowed to gratify his every desire. On the fatal day he was brought out and publicly clubbed to death. The body was then tossed about, kicked, mocked and abused; but afterwards worshipped as an orisha. Some of the tribes believe that the victim of a human sacrifice will (by way of compensation) be reborn and become a king. Bishop Johnson tells us of the human victim, that "he is commonly led and paraded through the streets of the town or city of the sovereign who would sacrifice him for the well-being of his government and of every family and individual under it, in order that he may carry off the sin, guilt, misfortune and death of every one without exception. Ashes and chalk would be employed to hide his identity by the one being thrown freely over his head and his face painted with the latter, whilst individuals would often rush out of their houses to lay their hands upon him that they might thus transfer to him their sin, guilt, trouble and death. This done, he is taken through a temporary sacred shed of palm and other tree branches and especially of the former, the *Igbodu*, and to its first division where many persons might follow him, and through a second where only the chiefs and other very important persons might escort and accompany him, and to a third where only the *Babalawo* and his assistant, the *Ajigbona* are permitted to enter with him. Here, after he himself has given out or started his last song, which is to be taken up by the large assembly of people, who have been waiting to hear his last word, or his last groan, his head is taken off and his blood offered to the gods. The announcement of his last word, or his last groan, heard and taken up by the people, would be a signal for joy, gladness and thanksgiving, and for drum

beating and dancing, as an expression of their gratification, because their sacrifice has been accepted, the divine wrath is appeased and the prospect of prosperity or increased prosperity assured."

The more usual method of execution in these cases was by beheading; but the writer was told that in the instance he personally experienced (but did not go to witness) the victim was clubbed. In the case of human victims offered to *Ogun*, before a war expedition, it was regarded as essential (in order that the sacrifice might be effectual) that the leaders should take the field before the body became offensive. When a human victim was offered to the devil, in olden days, his entrails were exposed before the temple, or shrine, and his body suspended from a tree, or scaffolding of poles.

Other instances of human sacrifice are in the case of twin-children and also of those who cut their upper teeth first,[1] which before the British occupation was "carried on at New Kalabar as in Aboh and Old Kalabar. Even as late as 1856 an albino child was sacrificed, at the bar of the first-named river, to the shark, who was up to a late period the juju of this country."[2]

Cannibalism.—There is no record of cannibalism of a general type among the Yorubas, although a neighbouring tribe dwelling on the shores of the lagoon has practised it, and it was formerly very common on the lower Niger. "During the year 1859 human flesh was exposed for sale as butchers' meat in the market at Duke Town, Old Kalabar."[3] But there is a practice which obtains among these people, which is of the

[1] Dr. David Livingstone records a similar custom among the Bakaa and Bakwains of South Africa.—*Missionary Travels and Researches*, p. 577.

[2] T. J. Hutchinson, *Ten Years' Wanderings among the Ethiopians*, London, 1861, pp. 45 *seq.*

[3] T. J. Hutchinson, *op. cit.* p. 60.

character of cannibalism and may be regarded as a branch of their religious belief and practice. Ellis tells us that the "Priests of Ogun usually take out the hearts of human victims (offered to their god in sacrifice.—S. S. F.), which are dried, reduced to powder, then mixed with rum, and sold to persons who wish to be endowed with great courage and who drink the mixture. The reason of this is that the heart is believed to be the seat of courage and to inherently possess that quality; and that when the heart is devoured and swallowed the quality with which it is imputed is also taken into the system." When the writer was in Abeokuta, on the death of a king his heart was taken out and had to be eaten by his successor. Also the head of the deceased monarch was preserved and had to be worshipped by the new ruler. The reason given by the Niger Tribes for justification of their practice of eating their enemies was that it gave them additional courage. Human sacrifices were generally only offered by chiefs of the highest rank, and this at the instigation of the priests and "in behalf of the town, government, or people."

Ordinary sacrifices may be offered for and by any private person, or a particular family, or a township, or the whole city, or country, in the name of its ruler or rulers.

A family sacrifice is *Ebo Agbole* (sacrifice of the household).
A township sacrifice is *Ebo Igboro* (sacrifice of the open street).
A city sacrifice is *Ebo Agbalu* (sacrifice of sweeping the town).
or *Ebo Oba* (sacrifice of the king).

We find, then, that the three main aspects of sacrifice are all represented in the Yoruba system:

(1) Food offered to the god—a "free-will offering."

(2) Food shared with the god—the "sacramental meal," or "communion":

(*a*) simply feasting on the victim; or

(*b*) "eating the god"[1] as when the new king eats his predecessor's heart to receive thereby his divinity.

(3) Propitiation for sin committed; not so much to remove guilt (as such), but to placate an offended deity and avert his threatened vengeance.

Priesthood.—The Yoruba priesthood has been regarded as comprising three distinct orders:

The first order, and by far the most important and influential, is that of the *Babalawos*, or priests of Ifa; and these are of various grades: the *Oluwo*, who is senior and chief, and whose directions must be obeyed by all the others, with the *Ajigbona* as his chief assistant, especially on great occasions (*e.g.* the offering of a great sacrifice); the *Odofin*, next in rank to the *Oluwo*, who acts for him in his absence; the *Aro* who is third in rank, and acts in place of his two seniors, when both are absent; the *Asare Pawo*, the messenger who calls assemblies and prepares the place of worship; the *Asawo*, deputy to the last named. An *Apetebi*, or *Esu*, or *Awayo*, is a woman, who is regarded as the wife of *Orunmila* himself, and who may be in reality either a Babalawo's wife, or the wife of anyone for whom a sacrifice is to be offered and who is always expected to give assistance at it. An *Aworo* is a chief minister devoted to a particular orisha and to him pertains the duty of putting to death the victim of a human sacrifice.

Ellis gives as a second rank of the first order of priesthood, priests of the medical orishas, *Osanhin*[2] and

[1] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*. On the whole subject see Jevons' *Introduction to the History of Religion*, Chaps. XI. and XII.

[2] Also spelt *Osanyin*.

Aroni; and as the third rank of the same order those who serve *Obatala* and *Odudua*. All of the above wear white clothes, except the priests of Ifa at Ife, who wear light blue. The marks of office of a Babalawo are a wristlet of palm fibre, or of variously coloured beads round the left wrist, and a cow's, or bullock's, tail, which he always carries with him, and a sacred staff of any one of four forms.

The Second Order (according to Ellis) includes in its first rank the priests of Shango, the *Oni-Shango* and the *Magbas*. The special badge is a necklace of black, red, and white beads. One of red and white only may be worn by any Shango worshippers. The second rank of this order comprises the priests of all other orishas except Orishako. Those consecrated to Ogun wear an iron bracelet on the left arm, and to Oshun, brass armlets and anklets. Oshun's necklace is of transparent amber-coloured beads.

The Third Order, again, has two ranks, the first being the priesthood (male and female) of *Orishako*, and the second the priests of demi-gods and deified men. These latter may have a small white mark on the forehead.

The priestesses of Orishako, as has been previously stated, wear a special vertical badge of red and white in the middle of the forehead. These priestesses are treated with the greatest respect, far more (very often) than that given to male priests. In Whydah, on the Dahomian coast, young girls are dedicated to the worship of the serpent and are called "brides of the serpent." They have figures of flowers and of animals burnt into their skin.

The duties of the priesthood are threefold, viz.: to act as mediators in offering sacrifices; to practise divination—whether by palm-nuts or drawing lots; to conduct trials by ordeal.

A FOREST PATH.

facing p. 104.

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Temples and Shrines.—These vary in importance, from enclosed temples, with attached priests and priestesses, to a tiny space with a small image over which is erected a frail roof of thatch, the sides being quite open. The temples were not open to any Christian missionary, or teacher; indeed the writer was told that any Christian man would enter some only at the peril of his life. In the streets of Abeokuta and Ibadan, great numbers of small idol-houses are met with. Ordinarily the temple is a circular mud hut thatched with grass, or palm leaves, the interior being painted in the colours sacred to the particular god. The doors, shutters, posts and eaves are rudely carved. Shrines are open to the street and any passers-by may show devotion to the deities represented.

Groves.—These are to be met with in Abeokuta, or any other large town, where there is plenty of thick bush; but most of the worst ones are away from the towns, right out in "the bush," properly so called. If one follows a small footpath leading into "bush" (*i.e.* thick, wild "scrub") he will probably come to a warning to stop. The path, shut in on both sides by thick bushes, will lead to, and through, a narrow entrance, which having no door or gate, has one or more palm-fronds stretched across it. This is called a *Mariwo*,[1] and is a sign that it is a sacred spot and no uninitiated person may pass the palm-branch, under pain of severe penalty—probably torture and death. There is, as a rule, no human guardian on duty; but the pagan Yoruba would fear the curse of the deity if he passed the palm-barrier. Should any unauthorised person dare to intrude, and be caught in the act, he would find himself in for serious trouble! These groves are frequently designated *Igboro*, *i.e.* *Igbo-oro*,

[1] *Mariwo* means "Don't pry into secrets."

" bush of Oro," indicating the form of spirit-worship practised there. Oro is sometimes played in the daytime, even when no confinement has been ordered, but it must be confined to these groves. In them have been practised terrible forms of torture and death on those who have been condemned and " handed over to Oro." Others, again, are dedicated to *Eluku*, *Egun*, *Ogun*, and other deities, for their secret worship.

Images, or Idols, may be classified as *public* and *private*. Public idols are those in the temples and shrines which are available for the worship of all who desire to render it. Private idols are those of the particular family or individual. In a certain part of the house, or compound, will be seen one or more fixed images to which devotion is daily paid by the inmates. These are frequently on the wall at the back of the veranda which faces the open courtyard of the compound. Orishas generally are not taken *into* dwelling-houses ; but *Shango* and *Oya* are exceptions to this rule. There are also the small portable images, generally of wood, which the worshipper can take with him when he leaves home. These correspond to the Semitic " teraphim." The images of the tutelary deities of particular individuals are destroyed on the death of these persons, since the " guardian angel " is supposed to have left them and they are no longer spirit-inhabited, but are merely " common wood."

Death and Burial Customs.—These may be noted here, as they are a form of worship, viz. : the beatification of ancestors. On the death of the head of a family, or any other person of importance, the watching relatives at once break out into most distressful wailing and lamentations. They rush out into the street, crying aloud, *Epa ! ! ! Oro ! ! Baba wa lo l'oni o ! Baba wa li a*

mwa! Awa ko ri o! Epa! Oro!—i.e. "Alas!!! Oro!!" (*i.e.* "Torment!" or invocation of "Oro," the spirit of death). "Our father has gone to-day! It is our father we are seeking! We cannot find him.—Alas! Oro!"—"I go to the market. He is not there!—I go to the streets. He is not there!—I go to the house. He is not there!—Never more shall I see him," etc., etc.

The body is carefully washed by the mourning relatives, and all hair shaved off. It is then rubbed all over with camwood and water. (This wood is white, but turns red on exposure to the air.) The body, having been clothed in its best garments, is then laid on a mat—the only bed known to a Yoruba. The feet are brought together and the great toes tied to each other, the hands being placed on the chest and the thumbs likewise tied. The mouth and nose are plugged with cotton-wool and each of the children of the departed one covers the body with a fine cloth.

Friends and neighbours are now invited to come and take part in mourning for the deceased, and in comforting the sorrowing relatives. The body is watched day and night, lamps being kept burning to dispel the darkness. The body is fanned by a young relative. If there is a grandchild whose mother is the deceased's daughter, it is the office of this little one to wield the fan. As the watching and mourning go on night and day, the funeral feast is continually kept up. Ample food is provided for the guests, and continual supplies of drink, native beer, palm wine, and trade gin and rum, are freely indulged in; but not by the chief mourners, who remain shut up in a neighbouring apartment. The beating of drums is kept up almost continuously, and this feasting and drumming is maintained, in the case of any person of importance, for a full week. If the deceased has a married daughter,

her husband is responsible for the digging of the grave, which has from time immemorial always been in the house of the departed. The floor of the native houses is of beaten mud, which is kept in condition by being rubbed over every week with horse-dung and water. The grave having been dug, with the assistance of a number of helpers, a sheep or goat is purchased (at the expense of the deceased's children) and, the body having been laid in the grave, the animal to be sacrificed is killed over it, so that its blood falls upon the corpse. Then the sons and daughters weep over the open grave so that their tears likewise fall upon it. They also express good wishes to the deceased, "May you arrive in peace"—"May you not stray from the right path," etc. The grave, which is usually very shallow, is then filled in.

The expense of these funerals is very great and often leads to the impoverishment of the whole family, so much so that the mourners will sell themselves into slavery, or pawn their children as slaves, in order to provide a great funeral. This is not entirely due to a feeling of pride, but to show due reverence to the deceased, for it is believed that the soul of the dead cannot attain to the realms of departed spirits, unless and until the body is duly and respectably buried ; otherwise it wanders about, or hovers near the body, in terrible restlessness.

The burial of persons of importance has been from of old the prerogative of the *Ogboni* society. This is the senatorial court of the town, or district, and its power is so great that even the king and head chiefs dare not go against it. It is one of the leading secret societies, or guilds, of the country and any free man may be initiated as a kind of honorary member ; but this does not entitle him to sit in the senate. To this society, and to any others of which a man may be a member, very heavy fees

have to be paid on his burial, ostensibly that they may make adequate *etutu*, or propitiatory sacrifices. "Adesola" (the pseudonymous writer on burial customs in the *Nigerian Chronicle*) says: "There is no native but belongs to one or another of these guilds. Some belong to several and a man's rank is estimated according to the guild, or guilds, to which he belongs. Whatever amount remains after the necessary expenses are made is distributed among the members, and every individual is given a portion, however small, in proportion to his status. The enjoyment of this benefit is regarded as one accumulated debt for every individual, and imposes an obligation upon their children to make similar contributions to the guild towards their parents' funerals at their deaths. . . ." The " song repeated at funerals is to keep them always in recollection of this fact. This expense is always heaviest in connection with the Ogboni society. This is both a political, social, and secret society. In fact it is the king's chief consultative chamber in all matters, and its principal members form the cabinet. They lay the corpse with full masonic rites. In their passage to and from the house of mourning, they sound alarms with their state drums of various height and sounds so that every woman, or uninitiated man, might flee from their presence, either in the street or in the house of mourning. . . . The members are sometimes called *Oshogbo*, which is the *Ijebu* name for this society. A few elderly women are always admitted and these are generally distinguished from others by having certain cotton strings (*okun*) tied round their wrists; such women are supposed to be for ever precluded from marriage."

To comfort the mourners, and especially to confirm the women in the belief that the soul lives after death and goes to the abode of spirits, the aid of the *Egun* and *Oro*

societies is called in. While the mourning relatives are all assembled, a person who acts as *Egun* lies hidden in an adjoining room. Presently one of the mourners strikes on the ground thrice and cries out, *Baba, baba, baba! Da mi l'ohun!* *i.e.* "Father, father, father! Answer me!" . . . From the adjoining room comes an answer in "Egun-voice" (ventriloquial), and all are comforted and filled with joy, on the supposition that the spirit of the deceased, although unseen, is indeed present with them. Food having been placed by the women in the Egun's room (he having concealed himself, or departed) after he has answered, each guest in turn goes in and helps himself, thus performing an act of communion with the deceased. The Egun does not wear his dress while concealed in the room; but, should he desire to come out and join in the festivities, he dons it and will then speak as, and state himself to be, the spirit of the one who is being mourned. Eguns going thus into the street claim to have come from heaven, and to be therefore entitled to respect and to free-will offerings from the people. Some days after the burial an *Egun* comes at *night* and calls out the name of the deceased; and, after further days have passed, he comes in the daytime, accompanied by followers, and proceeds to the house of the deceased, where he reports that he has safely reached the spirit-world and is well and happy. In response to this good news he is provided with food, rum, and palm-wine, of which he partakes in private, since spirits must not be seen to eat! When he and his followers have finished, loud groans indicate that he is departing.

After the burial *Oro* comes, at night, of course, for no woman must see him. A ram may be killed and cooked and its head placed on the wall near to the grave of the worshipper's father. The figure of a man is drawn with

white chalk on the wall near to the grave, and the head is hung on this figure. We may again quote from "Adesola's" article in the *Nigerian Chronicle*: "The whole company of gods and men proceed outside to what is called the *Oro-pagi* ('Oro kills the tree') or *Oro-jegi* ('Oro eats the tree') ceremony. For its performance the newly deified takes the company to the highest tree in the neighbourhood, in order to show proof of its divinity by 'eating up' every leaf thereon, to its latest shoot. At a convenient distance from this tree gods and men accommodate themselves as best as possible—the gods crying with all their might and the men drumming very loudly, singing and dancing at the same time. As it is not permitted to the uninitiated to know how this spirit feat is performed, suffice it to say that one wakes up in the morning to see that particular tree denuded of its leaves: and it will require the service of the most powerful microscope to discover even the tiniest and latest shoot anywhere about the tree up to the loftiest branch, or on the surrounding surface, or anywhere about the vicinity of the tree. These leaves are supposed to have been literally eaten up by the god. Suspended on this tree between any two of its branches which are topmost, or sometimes left streaming on one of the branches which is the highest, is a new mat or a white or a red piece of cloth. . . . What these mats or cloths are intended to symbolise ought to be evident. . . . Unlike the *Egungun* and the *Agemo*, the incarnated form of the *Oro* is never habited in cloths or mats. What its nature and habiliments are is supposed to be a mystery and jealously guarded, up to the present, from the gaze of women. In fact, *Oro* is worshipped more in its inane and spiritual form than in a materialised shape. It is to the former that sacrifices are offered, not to the latter. Among the

Egbas, who are the originators of this cult, the *Oro Awe* ceremony is the only funeral rite performed in connection with this worship, when the spirit is supposed to pass from the 'unburied' into the 'buried' state. Viewing it in this connection the mat, or cloths, suspended on the tree must be taken to represent the mats or cloths with which the dead was buried; and its suspension to signify that the spirit of the deceased, now purified with funeral rites, and having entered into that state of spirit life in which it can be invoked and worshipped, cast behind it in its flight to the spirit world, these earthly encumbrances as being useless to it. . . . After the completion of this *Oro-pagi* ceremony they (gods and men) again repair to the house; and having regaled themselves with the remnants they re-form into a procession, remove the *mariwo* from the gate, march direct for the *Aboro's* and thence to their own house, ere break of day. In the morning the inmates return to the house of mourning, set a mark to the dedicated spot and congratulate one another that the departed has passed into the *Oro* stage and can be invoked at any time for worship."

The death of the well-to-do head (*Bale*) of a compound adjoining the mission house at *Ake* in Abeokuta was celebrated with all the foregoing ceremonies, and shortly afterwards the writer noticed on the country road a new shrine consisting of a small thatched shed, which protected a mud image, intended to represent the deceased, and marked with his tribal mark (*i.e.* three vertical cuts on each cheek). About the image were placed some of his possessions and offerings of food. This shrine, however, was soon neglected and the image fell into decay.[1]

Should a member of the *Oro* society die, his funeral must be attended by every one of his fellow-members.

[1] See p. 76—"the *Ipade* ceremony."

The chief mourner gives to *Oro* a sacrifice of a ram, native beer, and kola-nuts. The kola is then made to touch the head of the corpse, and the mourners with their closed fists, one on the top of the other, touch the head likewise, and then the head of the son who is to succeed the deceased. The head of the corpse is again touched three times with the kola, and then the head of the son, and prayer is offered to the dead that he will bless the living. The ram is then killed and the children rub its blood on their heads. This sacrifice must be repeated by the children every year, and the ram's head (as stated above) affixed to the wall.

It may here be noted that the great and solemn importance attached to the Yoruba burial customs was a sore test to early converts to Christianity. They were taunted by heathen with the words, " You will be buried out in the bush ! "

Secret Societies.—Throughout the whole of pagan West Africa there are many secret societies, which are all of a religious or semi-religious character. Some of these have already been prominently before us, viz. : the *Oro* society, the *Egun* society, and the *Ogboni* society. These have been compared by some writers with European Freemasonry and its various grades and lodges. Some of them would seem to be of totemic origin, *e.g.* the " Leopard," " Crocodile," and " Python " societies of the Sierra Leone *hinterland*. The members of these cults have made it their business to destroy human life in terribly cruel ways. During the Sierra Leone rebellion of 1895–1896, many bodies of human victims were found in the bush, bearing marks as if slain by one of the creatures from which these societies take their names. Members of the " Leopard " society wore leopard skins, which had the pads fitted with sharp steel claws with which they mauled and slew their victims. The " Crocodile "

society members likewise clothed themselves with crocodile skins, and with sharp-teethed instruments slew their victims, and the " Pythons " crushed theirs to death. These victims were supposed to be slain by the god of the particular cult to satisfy his vengeance. The leading secret society of the Sierra Leone and Timne country is known as the *Poro* society, and its leading ministers or magicians as *Tassos* and *Morrimen*.

Totemism.—There is no organised and general totemism to be found among the Yorubas worthy of any degree of comparison with that of the aborigines of Australia, or of the Red Indians of British Columbia ; but traces of it are to be found, not only in the secret societies already referred to, but in the spirit of taboo which prevails so strongly in Yoruba-land under the name of *Ewo*. A careful study of this system of prohibition shows how jealously it guards against any possibility of undesirable marriages. It provides the equivalent of a table of kindred and affinity, showing the degrees of consanguinity within which marriage is forbidden. It can also be made exclusive, by pronouncing all who are of a certain family, or tribe, to be *ewo* to the parties concerned. Colonel Ellis, in his book on the *Tshi-speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast*, tells us that a belief in totemism is common among these tribes. They are divided into totemic clans (or families) such as the " Leopard," " Dog," " Buffalo," " Parrot," " Plantain," " Corn-stalk," " Palm-oil grove," " Abadzi " and " Dumnica " clans.[1] A member of the Leopard clan may not kill a leopard ; but should he do so accidentally he must bemoan him, " Alas ! my brother ! " and pour palm-oil on the wounds he has inflicted. The totem-animal is addressed as " Grandfather," which is also given as a title of respect to the King of Ashanti, even as

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 206.

the title " Leopard " is in Yoruba-land given to the *Alafin* of Oyo. When a member of the Leopard clan dies, its members make spots on their bodies to represent the leopard's skin, and scratch the figure of a leopard on the wall of the house and on the coffin. Dr. Nassau tells us that totem-worship is found to some extent in the Gaboon and Agowe districts ; but that is almost nothing in comparison with that of the Indian tribes of the North American continent.

CHAPTER IX

THE WORLD OF THE MYSTERIOUS

INTIMATELY associated with the religion of primitive peoples are to be found certain forms of belief and practice in the region of the "uncanny," variously designated as "superstition," "fetich," "magic," "mana," "witchcraft," "occultism," etc., and illustrated by the use of charms and amulets.

The African child of nature, like his brethren of other primitive races, has a profound respect for, and a very real belief in, the mysterious. He believes intensely in the spirit-world, and in the possibility of exercising, through spirit-agency, a power that can be exercised by no physical means. He has also a firm belief in an indefinable sort of power, that he calls by a special term, for which in English (lacking an equivalent word) we use the term "medicine." This is very similar to the conception of *mana*,[1] which prevails among the tribes of Melanesia and Australia, and which has claimed so much attention from anthropologists, since Bishop Codrington first called attention to it. This term is used to denote a mysterious power, or influence, which is supernatural, and beyond the power of the senses to detect, or of the mind to explain. It may, or may not, be connected with some spirit, or

[1] Carpenter, Dr. J. Estlin, *Comparative Religion*, p. 80 *seqq.*; Marett, Dr. R. R., *The Threshold of Religion.*

deity. Originally, and perhaps more usually, the conception is not directly connected with any such being. It is not the same as "magic," for it is sometimes attributed to inanimate objects, such as a stone of unusual form. Should one be found resembling a yam, it may be buried where yams are cultivated, and if a good harvest results this is attributed to the *mana* possessed by the said stone. Any power, or skill, beyond the average, possessed by a person, securing success in war, hunting, etc., may be attributed to *mana*. It is, in short, a general term for power, or influence, of any "uncanny" type, whether for good or evil. A similar conception is found among the Iroquois Indians of Huron, expressed by the term *orenda*.

Among the Yoruba people the same idea of supernatural and supersensuous power is expressed by the term *ogun*. The significance of this term is generally expressed in English by the word "medicine," not medicine of a material kind, *e.g.* drugs, for which the term *egbogi* is generally used, but of that kind which is practised by a "medicine-man," or witch-doctor. It is, however, not a specific term limited to witchcraft, for which the word is *aje*; but a general one, which may be used for this, or other forms of mysterious power, either good or bad, and possessed not only by wizards, but by other human beings, or animals, or even inanimate objects. The following are some examples of the use of the term, which will show the similarity to the Melanesian *mana*.

The dread of mysterious power, unseen and intangible, is expressed in a proverb about the lion:

Kiniun di elewon, ki erankoki ki o ma iso je, kiniun ko je eran ikasi: bi yio ba dun, a ni, Bikose erin, bikose enia, bikose ohun dudu, on ko beru enikan;

that is:

The lion is the snare of the forest; let every beast take heed how he feeds, for the lion does not eat stale meat. When he roars, he says, "Except the elephant, except man, except *the black thing*, I fear nobody."

The order of dread is on the ascending scale, "*the black thing*" signifies the "uncanny," the vague mysterious power greater than man.

At the sacred town of Ife are some ancient pillars of stone, conical, round and rectangular. Nothing is known of their history; but they are said to be the bodies of gods, or men, who were turned to stone, and (being mysterious, and supposed to possess power) are called *ogun*.[1]

On the opposite page is shown a photograph taken by the writer in one of the townships of Abeokuta, esteemed so very sacred that a mere look at the shrine and the setting up of the camera caused opposition which seemed likely to develop into serious trouble, until an explanation and request to a passing chief secured official permission to take the picture. The palings enclose a pedestal, on which rests a slab of stone. The frayed palm-fronds and grass suspended in front are the *mariwo* (which means "Don't pry into secrets!") Inquiry as to what shrine it was elicited no further response than *Ogun ni, i.e.* "It is *ogun*." It is hardly likely that the god *Ogun* could have been indicated, for a shrine of a totally different character, dedicated to him, was close by.[2] The Yoruba native is, however, very fond of punning, especially with words of precisely the same form and sound, but differing in tonal accentuation.

Things used in spirit-worship, *e.g.* the wooden masks

[1] This term seems to have been mistaken by Dennett for the name of the god *Ogun*; but, since the stones are said to be the remains of other deities (*Yemuhu* and *Obatala*), there is obviously some mistake! *Yemuhu* is evidently a mistake for *Yemaja*.

[2] See illustration opposite p. 52.

A WAYSIDE SHRINE, SHOWING THE "MARIWO."

facing p. 118.

worn in Oro-worship, the "Oro-stick" (*i.e.* the "bull-roarer"), the magician's staff, etc., may all be said, in a loose sense, to possess *Ogun*, but, so far as is known to the uninitiated, Oro-sticks are not treated with any such ceremony as the *churinga* of the Australian blacks.

A curse is greatly dreaded, because it possesses this same mysterious power. So far does this go, that to foretell possible evil, even in a friendly warning, arouses great fear. Such an injunction as "Take care, or your child will be sick," will call forth the expostulation, "Ah! you are cursing him." The idea is (apparently) that *ogun*, possessed by the speaker (presumably his psychic force), goes forth with the words to effect what is prognosticated.

But the strongest and most terrible exercise of this mysterious power is experienced in the dreaded practice of *apeta*, *i.e.* "invocation-shooting"—a form of "sympathetic magic." A person, desiring to kill any one against whom he has a grudge, makes a mud image of his intended victim, and at night sets this up, calls the name of his foe three times, and then shoots at the figure with a miniature bow and arrows. At that instant the victim feels a sharp pain in the region of his body which, in the figure representing him, has been struck by the arrow. A wound, or abscess, quickly develops, from which he soon dies, unless he recognises the nature of the injury and can apply a counter-charm, a more powerful "medicine" (*ogun*) than that which has injured him. A native clergyman, well educated and thoughtful, showed the writer a terrible scar on his leg, which he steadily affirmed was produced, in his youth, by *apeta*. On the other hand, the writer once attended a woman suffering from cancer of the breast, which the sufferer attributed to *apeta*. But such an error in diagnosis does not alter the fact of

the existence of the "idea" in the Yoruba belief, nor prove that there are no genuine cases. In their work, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, Messrs Spencer and Gillen describe the practice of *Arungquiltha*, the use of the magic spear, which closely corresponds to the Yoruba *apeta*. M. Declé [1] also tells us that "among the Matabele of South Africa, it is well understood that there are two kinds of witchcraft. . . . To bewitch any one, according to Matabele belief, it is enough to spread medicine on his path, or in his hut. . . . If you want to cause an enemy to die, you make a clay figure . . . pierce it with a needle. The first time he comes in contact with an enemy he will be speared."

The Rev. J. Buckley Wood, who had at the time spent forty years among the Yorubas, told the writer that, when he was visiting a certain chief, the latter said of a man at a great distance who had offended him, "He shall die to-morrow." It was impossible for him to send a messenger, or any poison, to reach his foe in less than three days, and yet in about a week came the news that the man had died on the day predicted. The form of "black magic" used in this case was not made known.

The evidence for these cases is so strong that it is difficult to disbelieve them. The writer, sceptical at first, was compelled by the testimony of unimpeachable witnesses to modify his own views. In common with other missionaries he experienced at times a deep consciousness of the presence of some unseen personality resisting strongly all Christian effort. Such experiences, together with the testimony of the best native converts, account for the fact that many Christian missionaries believe that these terrible forms of "sympathetic magic"

[1] Declé, Lionel, *Three Years in Savage Africa* (London, 1900), pp. 152–153.

are performed through the agency of evil spirits, but it is, of course, theoretically possible that a psychological force, of far greater power than we at present understand, is the effective cause. There is certainly intense projective force of will exercised.[1]

The power of "medicine" (*ogun*) exercised through a certain channel may be neutralised or overcome by a superior power of *ogun* through another channel. Van Gennep tells us that in Madagascar *fady* (the local name for "taboo") may be broken by one who has a higher power known as *hasina*. So in Yoruba, a stronger "medicine" is employed to overcome, or counteract, an evil one, or a curse incurred through a broken *ewo* ("taboo"). This is the explanation of the use of "charms," whether material (as amulets), vocal, or actionary. It is the invocation of a higher power, or a fuller measure of the same power.

The term *ogun* may be used in a good sense, although more often it carries a bad one. The Yoruba word for physician is *onisegun*, *i.e.* "he who works *ogun*." The cognate word *ologun*, *i.e.* "he who has *ogun*," is only used of one who practises "bad medicine," witchcraft, etc. The accusation of witchcraft is much dreaded, and may lead to trial by ordeal, as told in a previous chapter.

Dr. Marett says, "Not every man has *mana*, nor every ghost, but the soul of a man of power becomes as such a ghost of power, though in his capacity of ghost he has it in greater force than when he was alive."[2] Substituting the word *ogun* for *mana* this exactly applies to the Yoruba belief.

The words "fetich" and "fetichism," so constantly

[1] An exactly similar practice to the African *Apeta* is found among the Ojebway Indians (Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd edn.; *The Magic Art*, Vol. I. p. 55).

[2] *Threshold of Religion*, p. 134.

applied to West African religion, are often used in a loose and incorrect sense. The word "fetich" is from the Portuguese *feitiço*, which was applied by the voyagers from Portugal, who in the fifteenth century discovered the West African coast, to the charms and amulets which they saw the Africans wearing, and which they compared with their own images and relics of saints, etc. The term "fetich" is properly applied to any material object which has been duly prepared or consecrated by the witch-doctor, with appropriate rites and ceremonies, by virtue of which it becomes invested with power to perform the purpose for which it has been prepared, subject to the will of its possessor.[1] "Fetichism" is the term properly applied to the use of fetiches. A fetich is not worshipped, so that fetichism is not worship, and the religion of the African should not be so called, as it is only one of its features and not the thing itself. The owner "does not worship his fetich, but regards it as a little bit of property which cannot but be of service to him through its supernatural powers." [2]

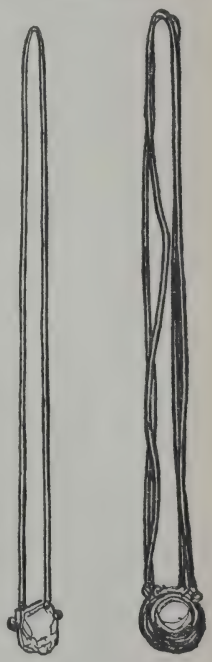
The purposes for which "fetiches," or charms, are used are past numbering. The Rev. J. L. Wilson, who has already been quoted, writes:

> There are several classes of fetish, for each of which there is a separate name. One of these classes embraces such as are worn about the person and are intended to shield the wearer from witchcraft and all the ordinary ills of human life. They are expected to bring him good luck, and inspire him with courage and wisdom. Another class are such as are kept in their dwellings, having a particular place assigned to them, and correspond in the offices they perform to the *penates* of the Romans. They have also nation-fetishes to protect their towns from fire, pestilence, and from surprise by their enemies.

[1] Dr. R. H. Nassau, *Fetichism in West Africa*, p. 75 f.
[2] Dr. A. Schweitzer, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, p. 50.

They have others to procure rain, to make fruitful seasons, and to cause abundance of game in their woods and fish in their waters.[1]

Charms and amulets of various kinds are greatly used by the Yorubas. The Bale, or head-chief, of Ogbomosho, being of a particularly nervous and superstitious nature, had not only a number of tutelary gods guarding the threshold of his dwelling, but had laid in the ground, from one side of his compound to the other, chains and other charms to render each person who approached him powerless to do any evil. Charms for the protection of property are fastened to the houses, etc. They may consist of sticks, stumps of trees, etc.



Amulets.

The general term for amulets, or body charms, is *onde* (*i.e.* "a prisoner"). These are usually sewn up in leather to be worn on the person. Some of these are made and sold by Mohammedan mullahs, and contain a few words from the Koran, or from an Islamic charm-book. Those made and sold by heathen priests may contain such substances as stones, chips, rags, sticks, spices, blood, clippings of hair, nails, etc. A human eyeball, or a bit of a human skull is specially prized. Sometimes snail-shells, or antelope horns, are used. The charm often has some connection with the purpose for which it is prepared, *e.g.*

[1] *Western Africa*, p. 214.

to give strength and courage, a portion of an elephant or a leopard ; to give speed or cunning, a bit of a gazelle ; or to give wisdom, a portion of human brain. Some amulets, as the iron armlet (*ajude*) worn by the worshippers of Ogun, have no virtue or " medicine " of their own, but are to remind the god that the wearer is under his protection.

Woman's Amulet Girdle.

Although the African does not worship his fetich, he has profound faith in it. The wearer of a protective charm against gunshot wounds challenged the writer to fire a gun at him while he was wearing the said charm,—indeed urged him to do so. Needless to say, the test was declined ! On another occasion, a maid-servant in the mission compound was stung by a scorpion, and the writer's cook took up the " venomous beast " and played with it, allowing it to run about in his hands ! He said that the charm against scorpion stings was to eat the sting of one, and as he had formerly done this he could not be stung. After the girl had been relieved by a hypodermic injection of potassium permanganate, she was persuaded by the cook to eat the sting which had caused her distress.

Witchcraft is a terrible reality to the pagan African, and as already stated the accusation of practising it is greatly dreaded. The witch-doctor is, of course, a privileged person. He is called in to trace the source of disease and death, for these are generally attributed to witchcraft, unless they are evidently caused by the vengeance of Shopono (smallpox), Shango, or some similar deity. Various forms of disease are described as "snakes inside" (*ejo-inu*), "an insect" (*kokoro*), etc., and it is supposed that these have been introduced by a foe through the agency of witchcraft. Strictly, a person accused of witchcraft should be tried by ordeal, and then, if proved guilty, immediately put to death; but so great is the indignation of the populace against the practice, that the accused is likely to be lynched without any trial. This mode of procedure has, of course, been modified where the British Government is in power.

Undoubtedly, witchcraft has always been largely practised, and under this term we should probably be justified in placing the deeds of many members of various secret societies, done in the darkness of the night. In Abeokuta, in an open thoroughfare, there was a well-thatched circular shed, the space covered being occupied in the centre by a conical mound of earth, the apex of which was covered by an earthenware lid. There was no sign of an image or any form of orisha. On lifting the lid, the writer was almost choked by the abominable effluvia which arose, for a large earthenware pot, built into the mound, was seen to be nearly full of a dark liquid, in which writhed and squirmed many huge grubs, like giant maggots. On making inquiry as to what this could be, he was told that this is called *Ere*, that it is only used for evil purposes, and that night-parties of bad persons would sit around to drink spirits and plan, or

perpetrate, evil deeds. Wizards are believed to hold nocturnal meetings at the foot of the *apa* tree (*i.e.* the African mahogany). Here, too, the owl often appears, but instead of being the messenger of the tree-spirit, the bird is the wizard himself. The *apa* tree is the emblem of vengeance. It is so sacred that before it is cut down its spirit must be propitiated by the offering of a fowl and palm-oil.

Another form of witchcraft is known as *Shigidi*, or *Shugudu*. This has sometimes been mistaken for an orisha, but it is not one. It is an utterly bad form of demonology, or witchcraft, perpetrated " through the agency of an evil spirit." It is akin to Eshu (Satan) and is employed by the *babalawos*. In connection with Ifa, it is regarded as more powerful than Eshu. It is always represented by a figure made of mud. Ellis (except that he seems to regard it as an orisha) gives a good account of it. He says it is " nightmare deified." Its name appears to mean something short or bulky, and the demon is represented by a short and broad head, made of clay, or more commonly by a thick blunted cone of clay, which is ornamented with cowries, and is no doubt emblematic of the head. Shigidi is an evil deity, or spirit, and enables a man to gratify revenge in secret, and without risk to himself. When anyone wishes to revenge himself on another, he offers a sacrifice to Shigidi, who thereupon proceeds to the house of the person indicated and kills him. The person who employs Shigidi must remain awake until that demon returns, or his mission will fail.

One other form of witchcraft that is believed in, is in connection with such secret societies as those of the Sierra Leone and Sherbro countries, already described as the " Leopard," " Crocodile," and " Serpent " societies. These societies, as such, are not mentioned as existing

among the Yorubas, but there are certain persons, members of the Egun society (but not all of its members), who claim to be able to turn into leopards, crocodiles, or pythons, to kill their victim, and then to turn into human beings again. This is done by Eguns only, and in co-operation with, and by the power of, the babalawos. The Yoruba term for this procedure is *Fan-gbe*, or *Idan*.[1]

It may be noted that many babalawos will undertake to kill enemies for their clients, by the exercise of sympathetic magic, or demonology. This murder by proxy is to save the actual murderer from all danger, and the babalawo, if called in to treat the sufferer, can saddle the crime on anyone against whom he has a grudge, and, of course, shield himself. Poisoning, by the use of natural poisons, is largely practised by these babalawos and others, who are terribly expert in this evil art. Many murders are thus committed with comparative impunity. But there remain many deaths which cannot be explained by the use of any material means, and must be attributed to black magic.

Crystal-gazing, as such, is not found ; but the use of lustral water is practised by babalawos thus : A young child is taken by the priest, and after the offering of a sacrifice, the child's face is washed with lustral water, which is prepared with shea-butter and edible snails. The child, in a trance, sees and hears what is going on in the spirit-world, and reports to the priest. The child's work being finished, the priest, by the use of appropriate charms, restores it to normal consciousness, when the medium no longer remembers anything of what he has reported, the priest alone retaining the knowledge.

[1] This belief in a transmigration, voluntary and terminable at will, though not general, has been found among almost all tribes (Nassau, *Fetichism*, etc., p. 53).

The last form of occultism we will deal with is necromancy. The late Bishop James Johnson wrote in his work on *Yoruba Heathenism* as follows :

> There are amongst the heathens those in our country who profess to exercise the office of speaking with the dead, and of being mediums of communications from them to the living, and who are known as *Awon Abokusoro*—" speakers with the dead "—and whose deliverances have generally been found to be true. But the system does not seem to be so elaborate with them as with their fellow-professors in Europe and America. . . . These divinations have often been successful. . . . This success must be attributed to either a synchronising of divinely ordered events with those divinations, or to God's permitted employment of them through the agency of the devil, with his superior knowledge and capacity to deceive those who would be deceived . . . in spite of warnings.[1]

In the year 1856 the Rev. J. L. Wilson, whose work has repeatedly been referred to, wrote :

> Native priests pretend to hold intercourse with them (*i.e.* the spirits) and become *media* between the dead and the living. The means by which this intercourse is held is always veiled in mystery, but quite as satisfactory proofs are given of the reality of the intercourse as are furnished by our modern spiritualists. . . . Undoubtedly it is a much older practice in Africa than in America. . . . It commands almost universal assent there.

One of the burial customs of the Yorubas is known as *Iyaku*, or " parting with the dead," and in this connection there is a form of necromancy practised, if the deceased has died intestate, to find out what is his will concerning his property and the disposal of his dependent relatives. A council of elders is appointed, and two days are decreed, with a week's interval between

[1] *Isin Bibo Orisa*, p. 36 *seq.*

them, for the necessary ceremonies. On the first day sacrifices are offered and a white fowl is tied to a pole. A figure in white dashes from the room of the deceased, seizes the fowl and flees into the bush, while the friends cry out, *File, file! i.e.* "Leave it, leave it!" They follow, but none overtake the "spirit." Only the feathers of the fowl remain to mark the course taken. A week later, further sacrifices are offered, kola-nuts are split in divination and their fragments thrown into a little hole dug for the purpose, together with some oil, water and sacred leaves. Three men, each holding in his hand the *atori* whip, demand the attendance of the spirit of the deceased. Their leader calls out his name and asks him to come out when he strikes on the ground, *e.g.:*

Buko, o-o-o-o-o-o! Mo pe o, o-o-o-o-o! Bi mo ba fi isan yi lu ile, k'o jade wa, o-o-o-o-o-o!

i.e.:

"Buko, Oh! I am calling thee, Oh! If I strike the ground with this whip, come out! Oh!"

There is no response at the first or second call. A third call is given, with an abusive reproach, "If you do not reply, I shall go away with the belief that your soul has gone away into the body of an *Ogbugbu* (wild-duck), etc." Then a shrill voice is heard in a neighbouring grove, which, after repeated strikings on the ground, declares his will, as requested. In this case it seems so evident that there is collusion, that it cannot be regarded as genuine necromancy. But the account here given is taken from a ceremony actually witnessed by the pseudonymous writer, "Adesola." [1]

[1] *Nigerian Chronicle*, Vol. I. Nos. 3, 4, 5.

CHAPTER X

THE SOUL OF MAN AND ITS DESTINY

WE have remarked in an earlier chapter that, "while the study of African psychology is very fascinating, it is equally difficult and perplexing," and that it is "extremely complex and equally variable."

The West African tribes generally, *e.g.* the Ashantis of the Gold Coast, the Dahomians, and the various tribes to the south of the Niger, besides the Yorubas, believe that each human being is indwelt by certain spirits. These spirits are not to be regarded as the man himself, or even part of him. His own soul is quite distinct from them. Among the Yorubas these are regarded as three in number: (1) *Olori*, "the lord of the head," dwells in the brain and is worshipped. Offerings, especially of fowls, are made to him, and the blood, with palm-oil, is rubbed on the forehead. Olori is credited with bringing good fortune, and a proverb says, "Olori causes the owner of the head to prosper and not the crab on the river-bank." Thus Olori appears to be the deification of intelligence and prudence. His symbol is half a calabash, studded over with cowries. (2) *Ipin-ijeun*, "the sharer of the food," dwells in the stomach. As he thus shares in all the food of his host, no sacrifices are offered to him; but a proverb says, "There is no orisha like the stomach.

It receives food every day." In some measure, hunger seems to be personified as the servant of *Ipin-ijeun*, for the Yoruba equivalent of " I am hungry " is *Ebi npa mi*, *i.e.* " Hunger is killing me." As fire is necessary for the preparation of food, Ipin-ijeun is said to take fire under his special protection ; hence the proverb, " Ipin-ijeun does not allow fire to depart from the earth." Fire itself is personified in the expression, *Ina njo*, *i.e.* " Fire is dancing," where we should say " is burning." (3) *Ipori*, the third of these indwelling guardian spirits, is the least in importance, and rarely receives any sacrifice, except that, before a journey is undertaken, the toe will be anointed with fowl's blood and palm-oil ; but water-fowl are *ewo* (" taboo ") for Ipori and must not be offered to him.

The primitive belief in the human soul, which preserves the personality and individuality of a man after death, arose, according to H. Spencer, from dreams.[1] Primitive man, dreaming of the dead, imagined that they continued after death and were met by his spirit when it was away out of his body. As his body continued to live and breathe while he dreamt, he concluded that he must possess two souls. Hence arose the belief in the " external soul." [2] The existence of this belief in the external soul, among the negroes of West Africa, is illustrated by the following story :

A queer West African story from Southern Nigeria relates how a king kept his soul in a little brown bird, which perched on a tall tree beside the gate of the palace. The king's life was so bound up with that of the bird that whosoever should kill the bird would simultaneously kill the king and succeed

[1] *Principles of Sociology*, p. 148 *seqq.*

[2] For the belief in two entities among the Dahomian and allied tribes, see Colonel Ellis' *Ewe-speaking Peoples*, p. 16 *seq.*

to the kingdom. The secret was betrayed by the queen to her lover, who shot the bird and thereby slew the king and ascended to the vacant throne.[1]

Dr. Nassau tells how the Fans variously say :

(1) " I am one and my soul is myself. When I die it goes out somewhere else."

(2) " I have two things. One is the thing which becomes a spirit when I die. The other is the spirit of the body and dies with it."

(3) Others admit a third entity, a dream-soul, which wanders from the body and returns.

(4) Others add a fourth entity, either a component part of the man or a guardian spirit.[2]

By the Yorubas, the man's own personal soul, or spirit, is called *iwin*, or *okan*, this latter word being literally " heart." It is used of the physical organ and also of the spiritual part of man. Another name is *ojiji*, or *oji*, *i.e.* " shadow," " shade," or " ghost." After death this human soul goes to *Ipo-oku*, " the place (lit. ' hole ') of the dead," which is supposed to be beneath the earth—hence in myths the men who became orishas " descended into the earth " without dying. The after-death condition is the continuance of a similar life to that lived on earth, and the individual does the same work and actions, and has the same characteristics, as when on earth. The importance of proper burial rites has been mentioned in an earlier chapter, for unless, and until, these are duly performed, the soul cannot pass to the realms of the dead ; but must wander about the earth in cold and hunger, and with no home. In this

[1] Quoted by Sir J. G. Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*, Vol. XI., from *The Lower Niger and its Tribes*, by Major A. C. Leonard, pp. 319–321.

[2] *Fetichism in West Africa*, p. 53.

condition it may be seized by an evil spirit and borne off to *Orun-apadi*.

The Yorubas believe in two "heavens." The good one is *Orun-afefe* ("the heaven of cool breezes"), or *Orun-rere* ("the good heaven"). This is the proper realm of disembodied human spirits. The other "heaven" is *Orun-apadi* ("the heaven of pot-sherds"), or *Orun-buburu* ("the bad heaven"). This is a hot, dry, barren place like a pottery-kiln, heated with charcoal and heaped up with broken earthenware, and, of course, no water! To prevent the departed soul being whisked off to this dreadful place during the interval between death and burial, a fowl is immediately offered to propitiate the evil spirits. This is called "the fowl that buys the road," *i.e.* secures the right of way for the deceased.

The doctrine of metempsychosis holds a large place in Yoruba belief. It generally takes the form of re-incarnation in a human body, and in the same family, for any number of times. The same guardian spirit as in an earlier existence may not, however, re-enter the child; should it do so, it would probably be an *Abiku* and kill him. Thus heredity is explained, not by the return of the same guardian spirit, but by metempsychosis. Since re-birth seems to be the general experience, it would indicate that there can be few souls in the two heavens; but yet we are told that heaven contains a great number of people. Should a mother die in childbirth, the new-born child is thrown into the bush to perish. "It is a wicked person, whose first act on re-entering the world is to murder its own mother!" A few days after the birth of a child, the *babalawo* is called in to tell the parents whose spirit, from among their former relatives, has animated the child. This the priest never fails to do,

and tells at the same time the god which the new-born child is to worship. Many Yoruba names end in *-tunde*, which means "—— comes again." The same belief and custom is found among the aborigines of Central Australia. Messrs Spencer and Gillen tell us that "the secret, or Churinga name" is "in some cases . . . that of the Alcheringa ancestor of whom he, or she, is supposed to be the re-incarnation." [1]

Sometimes the human soul may be re-born as an animal, *e.g.* a leopard, or even, occasionally, as a plant. Hyenas (perhaps because of their "laugh") are credited with being, more often than other animals, indwelt by a human soul. The yellow monkey, *Oloyo*, is said to be frequently likewise indwelt. The Yorubas believe that the lower animals possess passions, moral qualities and souls, even as men, and that their souls exist after death and pass over to the realms of the dead. The Tchwis of the Gold Coast believe that all things not made by human hands are inhabited by *kras*, *i.e.* spirits.

The Yorubas believe that transmigration of the soul into the body of a lower animal is infrequent, and that its re-entrance into the world in plant form is still more rare. Colonel Ellis relates at some length the legend of a boy, who with his brother went to a festival at a neighbouring village, where they so successfully entertained the people that they were each given one thousand cowries. On the way homeward the elder brother murdered the younger and took his cowries. In response to inquiries he said that he had left his brother behind on the road. As search failed to yield any trace of the lad, it was supposed that he had been kidnapped and sold. From his decaying bones sprang up a very large *olu*, or edible fungus, which was discovered by his

[1] *Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, p. 273.

mother, and, as she was about to pluck it, the fungus sang :

" Do not pluck me, Mother,
Do not pluck me, Mother,
Do not pluck me, Mother,
I am a lowly plant on the ground.

I went to the village frolic,
I went to the village frolic,
I am a lowly plant on the ground :
I was given a thousand cowries,
I am a lowly plant on the ground.

Do not pluck me, Mother,
Do not pluck me, Mother,
Do not pluck me, Mother,
I am a lowly plant on the ground.

My brother received a thousand cowries,
My brother received a thousand cowries,
I am a lowly plant on the ground :
But he slew me for *my* cowries,
I am a lowly plant on the ground."

The woman, amazed and shocked, called her husband, who in turn called the king, and to each of these the fungus sang the same song, substituting the correct term of address, " Father " or " King " respectively, as required. The elder son was brought and accused. On confession of his crime, he was killed, whereupon the younger son was restored to life.[1]

The prevalence of the belief in metempsychosis throughout Northern Guinea is also attested by the Rev. J. L. Wilson, who says :

The doctrine of transmigration is very common. Hence animals inhabiting certain localities, as the monkeys near

[1] *Yoruba-speaking Peoples*, pp. 134–136.

Fishtown, crocodiles near Dix Cove, snakes at Whydah, are sacred, because they are supposed to be inhabited by the spirits of the dead. Where a child bears a strong resemblance, physical or mental, to a deceased relative, it is said to have inherited his soul. Native priests pretend to hold intercourse with the spirits of children who are too young to talk, or to make known their wants. Their crying is often attributed to dissatisfaction at the name which has been given them, at the unsuitable nature of their food, or something else of a similar nature." [1]

From the burial customs of the Yorubas, practised by the *Oro*, *Egungun*, *Eluku*, and similar societies, as described in an earlier chapter, we find that they believe in the following doctrines concerning the subject of this chapter, viz.: "The Soul of Man and its Destiny":

(1) That man's nature is dual, consisting of soul and spirit.

(2) That while the body perishes, the spirit is imperishable, and is therefore the real essence or personality, being indestructible.

(3) That death is not the termination of existence, but only a change of state, in which his identity is preserved. He is still called by the same name.

(4) That each spirit can identify its own body, or its representative. This appears in *Eluku* worship, and shows a foundation for the belief in a bodily resurrection, according to the germ theory.

(5) The spirit of man is immortal. It can at any time be invoked.

(6) The spirit of man after death is deified and worshipped. It is interested in the affairs of men. The Yoruba has answered, to his own satisfaction, the question, "Do the dead know?"

(7) That although the spirit-world is unknown to us,

[1] *Western Africa*, p. 210.

it is, nevertheless, accessible to human appeals. Hence prayer and sacrifice will avail.

(8) That the spirit after death goes back to Him who gave it. This is expressed by the saying, *O re ehin, i.e.* "He has gone back."

(9) That there is in this life present reward for good conduct, and present retribution for evil deeds. *Oro*-worship exemplifies this.

(10) That judgment follows death is shown by the proverbial sayings quoted in Chapter III.

CHAPTER XI

THE END IN VIEW

WE have now to inquire as to the purpose, and the practical results of the belief and worship of the pagan Yoruba. What does he seek from his gods? What does he really obtain as the result of his religion?

Although he may not recognise the fact, he is really seeking after two things. He is endeavouring to solve the mystery of the unseen, to furnish himself with some understanding of the philosophy of the universe, and particularly of his own life. Further, he is seeking to satisfy that divinely implanted desire in the heart of man expressed in the well-known words of Augustine, that our hearts being made for God, can find no rest until they find rest in Him. But generally our heathen friend does not recognise this, and his prayers and sacrifices are, almost without exception, entirely mundane and largely materialistic. He is seeking a physical salvation from present evil. He knows little of the future and prepares for it still less. This is well illustrated by the titles of the chief forms of sacrifice, concerning which we cannot do better than quote again from the late Bishop James Johnson:

"There is a great variety of sacrifice, and each prescribed sacrifice, or each set of such a sacrifice, takes its

name generally from the object for which it is offered. Among them may be mentioned the following:

the redemption Sacrifice:

the exchange sacrifice:

the wealth and the longevity sacrifice:

the sacrifice for recovery from illness and preventing death:

those for the possession of strength and for the avoiding of losses of any kind:

those for protection against being a cause of trouble to one's own self:

those against being successfully plotted against:

those against a fire accident and for the removal of drought, or the prevention or the cessation of a flood of rain:

that for attaining to some title and office of dignity, and that for securing a long enjoyment of the office, especially if he who seeks it had been told beforehand through Ifa divination that his enjoyment of it would not be long:

that for securing the sign or mark on one's forehead that would assure him of his safety from the approach and touch of the angel of death, and of victory and triumph over difficulty and trouble; and

that for acquiring superiority to others, etc. These various sacrifices mentioned, being atonement sacrifices, suggest the existence originally in the mind of the Pagan Yoruban, that sin and the anger of an offended god are the cause of the various ills incidental to human life: that blessings are only to be had from him and according to his will, and that for this he is to be propitiated by means of sacrifice and offering, since he who desires them is a sinner."

Sacrifices and prayers are also offered for the gift of children. Hunters and travellers invariably offer sacrifices before setting out on an expedition, and are extremely careful when on that expedition to refrain from anything that would displease their gods and so spoil their chances of safety and success. A similar custom prevails in East Central Africa.[1]

We see then that the whole aim and object of our Yoruba pagan appears to be temporal advantage, prosperity, comfort and peace. Even the sacrifice for the dead (previously described) seems not so much to be for a removal of his sin and guilt, as to secure for him in the next world a happiness which is materialistic in its conception, rather than truly spiritual. There is no personal sense of sin as a loathsome moral disease from which the man desires to be set free, no love or desire for holiness for its own sake ; no love for the deity as a being who is worthy of love, and who himself loves and delights in his creatures, desiring them to cultivate a holy intimacy with himself. As we have seen, the belief in a Supreme Deity, perfect in himself and beneficent, is yet of one who is unapproachable, so that there is no conscious desire, or expectation, of entering into open communion with him.

It is commonly said, "there is good in every religion," but the recognition of this truth does not imply the belief that all religions are equally good, or that every particular religion is entirely good. That there are real advantages to the Yoruba pagan through his religion must be recognised. Some of these are the following :

The belief, vague and imperfect as it is, in the Supreme

[1] F. S. Arnot, *Garenganze*, p. 207.

[2] "Sin" is that which offends a deity and incurs his anger, which inflicts temporal harm on the offender.

Deity, *Olorun*, as a perfectly good and just being, even though by many he may be regarded as more or less indifferent to human affairs, is in itself a great asset. It is an example of the truth stated by the Apostle Paul in his speech at Athens, and emphasised in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, that the true God has "left not Himself without witness." This belief is an incentive to righteousness and, as seen in a previous chapter, holds out some prospect of future retributive justice.

The influence for good of Yoruba paganism is seen in the reverence which it teaches for the gods, and in the general practice, already mentioned, of daily morning worship before any of the day's business is begun. Faith in divine power, guidance and assistance is shown by the calling down, through prayer and sacrifice, of those blessings from the hands of the gods, as they are consulted in all important matters.

Next to respect for the deities themselves is the respect which the system teaches for authoritative governments. Not only are fetiches set up to detect and punish evil-doers; but the great secret societies as *Oro*, *Ogboni*, *Eluku*, etc., are "powers which be" and must be respected. Dr. Nassau, writing on this subject, quotes from a Sierra Leone newspaper as follows:

> The Oro of the Yorubas, the Porro of the Mendis, and the Bondo of the mixed masses who inherit Sherbo-land, have and exercise judicial functions exemplary and disciplinary in their effects. By their means law and order are observed to such an extent that many of the unrestrained and rowdy outbursts cowardly indulged in by so-called civilised communities and people are practically unknown.

In the family, filial regard and reverence for, and obedience to, parents on the part of children are taught

and practised, as well as care for them in their old age and in times of sickness, and other times of necessity, however caused. Respect for all aged persons is shown by prefixing to their names the titles "Father," or "Mother." In the pidgin-English of "the Coast," these terms become "Daddy——" or "Mammy——."

Although polygamy is practised, the marriage bond is held to be strictly inviolable and to be permanent; wives are to be subject to their husbands and husbands to care for their wives.

Hospitality is regarded as a sacred duty, especially towards strangers. Any visitor, or "caller," should always be entertained with some little gift, *e.g.* kola-nut, at least. Fidelity in friendship, chastity, truthfulness in speech (although this is constantly disregarded—"to talk Yoruba" being a proverbial expression for "lying!") —honesty, kindness, and often courage, are all taught as duties. Murder, theft, and witchcraft, are all punishable by death. Sexual impurity in the married, or unmarried, is a social disgrace and punishable by fines, torture of a certain kind, selling into slavery, and even in some cases (if royalty's honour is concerned) by death. Yoruba heathenism also discountenances, and treats with dishonour, suicide, neglect or refusal of payment of just debts, insolvency, pride, vanity and extravagance.

The motives for the practice of virtue and abstention from wrong-doing are the fear of retributive justice, or the hope of fitting reward, at the hands of the deities, and social disgrace and punishment at the hands of man, this falling not only on the offender, but upon his relatives also. As we have seen it also gives some hope of life after death.

But after we have allowed for the good there is in the system, we must fully recognise its defects:

It does not, and cannot, bring man into close touch and communion with a God of love and goodness.

It teaches morality of life; but cannot give the power to practise this. It has no conception of "Divine grace working effectually in them that believe."

It gives no real comfort when the sorrow of death falls upon a home. The awful, blank despair of the heathen at such a time is beyond conception, unless it has been witnessed.

Not only has it these negative defects; but it has great positive evils. The system has been responsible for atrocious and abominable cruelties, self-torture, and torture of unwilling victims, and for countless revolting murders of men, women and children in human sacrifice. It has become the fashion with some writers on the History of Religion to extol (rather than condemn) these things as being "not heartlessness or cruelty—but obedience to that law of the supernatural which ever claims for itself supremacy over all laws and all passions of the natural man," [1] to regard them as though they were the supreme sacrifice of hearts which were lovingly and loyally consecrated to the deity concerned! A writer who has never lived among the heathen, still less entered (at least in some degree) into their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, or seen their abominations, may easily fall into the error of crediting them with high and lofty ideals which only exist in his own cultured mind; but let him live for a few years in "darkest Africa," and he will soon become disillusioned, and be ready to admit the truth of the Psalmist's words that "the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty." He will learn also to confess that the Apostle Paul was not mistaken when he said, "the things which the Gentiles

[1] Brinton, *Religions of Primitive Peoples*, p. 189.

sacrifice they sacrifice to demons (δαιμονίοις) and not to God" (1 Cor. x. 20); when he sees that they only offer these to turn away the wrath of malicious deities, and themselves take a fiendish delight in their barbarities.

This religious system is also directly responsible for many poisonings, and the black magic of "witchcraft" which has prevailed for so many centuries. These things, and the murders perpetrated through their means, are nearly all done by the babalawos, or priests, who will (for a consideration) dispose of a man's enemy without exposing their client to any risk.

If we accept the modern view that there is "only one religion" and that all the so-called "religions" are but different manifestations of that one, we must admit that such a manifestation as that of Yoruba paganism is a terribly degenerate and corrupt representation of the true.

CHAPTER XII

THE WARRANT, OBJECT AND METHOD OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

HAVING reviewed the nature and the outcome of Yoruba heathenism, we may now consider the subject of Christian missions to its devotees. Are such missions justified? What do they seek to do for the African? How do they, or should they, go to work? What are the results?

Some persons have not considered it sufficient to *question* the justification of Christian missions to heathen peoples; they have deliberately *denied* that there is any such justification, and have sought to justify such denial by the assertion, "the heathen have very good religions of their own." This point of view appears to find a considerable amount of support in some modern works on the History of Religion. An unprejudiced study of the true condition of things in lands where heathenism prevails leads to a very different conclusion. Had we nothing better than their present belief to offer to the pagans of West Africa there would be some justification for the objection raised by non-Christians; but the loyal follower of the Founder of Christianity would still recognise that the command which Christ gave to His Church, "Go ye and make disciples of all nations," etc., is binding and must be obeyed. But, apart from this,

the objection is answered by the fact that Christianity offers to the heathen the following advantages above his present religion :

(1) It gives a clear and definite belief in great truths concerning man, his origin, his life, his destiny, salvation from sin and all trouble—death not excepted—thus removing the terrible uncertainty and despair which paganism involves. It reveals God as a loving Father who actively cares for His children.

(2) It renews and brightens man's present life, not only by setting before him high ideals of morality and holiness, but by providing the power to live accordingly ; through a living, personal Saviour and Friend.

(3) It holds out a blessed and certain prospect of future and eternal happiness, undreamt of in heathenism.

The true object of Christian missions has at times been somewhat obscured. Missionaries have sometimes acted too much as though the object were to *civilise* and *Europeanise* the natives of heathen countries, and not a few of those natives have seemed to suppose that the acceptance of western customs of clothing, education, etc., constituted the acceptance of Christianity. It is now, however, increasingly recognised that the one great object is to *evangelise* and *Christianise* the peoples of these lands and to leave them, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God, to organise their own church life in accordance with the needs and circumstances of their own lands and environment. This has been particularly the experience in West African missions. Whereas the early converts generally took a European name and wore at least one article of European dress, nowadays African names are preferred, and African dress largely worn, especially in the interior.

The modern Christian missionary does not begin work

by methods calculated to antagonise. He does not say, "Your religion is all wrong! I come to set you right." His first aim is to win the confidence of the people, and when he begins to teach, he lays hold of the elements of truth in their present belief, which are common to them and him, and so develops those elements that he can lead up to the revelation of God as a God of love in the mission of Jesus Christ. The following outline is typical of many interviews held and visits paid by the writer:

Knocking at the door, or standing in the gateway of a dwelling, the visitor calls out *Ago-le o!* and receives the reply, *Ago ya!* Permission thus asked, and obtained, for entrance, salutations are exchanged, and a silent look of inquiry on the part of the host, or hostess, indicates "What is the object of your call?" The missionary then says, "I come to speak to you the words of God (*Olorun*)."—"That is very good. We are glad to hear." Then the visitor appeals to the customary sayings about God, enlarges upon His goodness and love, and, after quoting their own proverbial sayings, leads on to His hatred of sin and all evil, and His love in sending His own Son, Who offered one great all-sufficient sacrifice so that none other is needed. Then he tells of the personal love and grace of God desiring each of His human creatures to come to Him for blessing, life and salvation.

The missionary of to-day uses any lawful means to exemplify the great truth he comes to proclaim, remembering always that his life is the most powerful witness of the power of his message. He uses, therefore, the witness of a true Christian philanthropy, in relieving the sick and suffering, providing for outcast lepers, orphaned children, and others who are uncared for by the heathen generally. Amazement is expressed that a white lady, or gentleman, should wash and tend the ulcerated legs of a slave, or adopt a motherless infant whom nobody wants. In time they learn to realise that there is a wonderful motive

to which they have been entire strangers—" the love of Christ constraineth us." Educational and industrial mission work are likewise exemplary as well as remedial.

The results of modern missionary work vary greatly in different countries, and it is not the purpose of this treatise to give them in general. The examples which follow are adduced as evidences of the justification of Christian Missions in the country whose religion has been described.

Frequent mention has been made of the *babalawos*, or priests of Ifà, who are the highest authorities in Yoruba heathenism. They are the shrewdest and most intellectual of their race, profound thinkers, and of great subtlety and knowledge. They are pre-eminently responsible for the cruelties and evil deeds to which reference has already been made. It is then no slight token to the power and value of Christian truth, when one of these men accepts Christ as his Saviour and consecrates his life to His service. There were two such men personally known to the writer :

(1) *Fadipe* was a babalawo living in Abeokuta. As he crossed over a rocky hill one day and sat down to rest, a Christian native likewise sat down, and presently entered into conversation with the *babalawo*. As he told him of the Saviour, the priest became deeply interested, and the outcome was his acceptance of Christ. He then devoted his life to farming at a place called *Isan*, a country district in the " bush," many miles from Abeokuta. Having learned to read, he felt he could not leave his neighbours and friends in ignorance of God's great love, and, as he had formerly led them astray, so now he must lead them to Christ. He began to conduct services for them. Numbers came every Sabbath. There were ten young men who walked a great distance, some a three hours' journey (six hours, including the return), to be present each week. This work so spread and extended that it became a great centre of " farm-station " work. It was, of course,

entirely voluntary, unpaid labour on the part of the converted babalawo. His only library was his Yoruba Bible, Prayer-book and Hymn-book.

(2) *Agbede*, or "Shadrach," was another converted babalawo. His life was a very different one from that of *Fadipe*. Whereas the latter practised social Christianity, Agbede was a strict ascetic, almost a recluse. After the death of his wife he lived entirely alone. On his conversion to Christianity, he became a blacksmith (*Agbede*="blacksmith") and worked at his trade four days a week, giving up Sunday, Wednesday and Saturday entirely to preaching. He also erected a platform, as an open-air pulpit, outside his house, and used to get up and preach at any hour of the night. His voice would carry a great distance in the silence of the night and some marvellous results followed his preaching. Eventually he gave up his whole time to preaching and supported himself simply by growing a few vegetables on which he lived. From being a very prosperous "consultant" (for a babalawo's profession is very lucrative) he voluntarily adopted a life of extreme poverty that he might give his whole time to preaching the gospel. He always refused to accept any gift (except that, now and again, if a missionary said, "*Agbede*, God told me to give you this," he would do so) and never took any food but what his own hands had prepared: this probably because he knew only too well the great skill and subtlety of African poisoners. When questioned by any one as to his course of action (*e.g.* preaching at night) he would invariably answer, "God told me to do this, and what He tells me I must do." After some years, he left Ibadan and went to live in and preach at his native place, a town in a remote district, where there was no other Christian witness. These two men, while strongly holding that the system they had followed was evil and Satanic, remained thoroughly loyal to their former associates and never divulged any of their secrets.

The character of Native Christian Churches in the mission field has often been slanderously maligned. The truth is, that, generally speaking, they will compare most favourably with average Christian Churches in the home countries, *e.g.*:

In Lagos (the seaport of Yoruba-land) in 1892 the number of Christians in the Protestant Episcopal (Church of England) Native Church was about 3300. These supported six churches, eight native clergymen, a school (with paid schoolmaster) in connection with each church, various other local works, and had their own missionary society sending out about twelve native missionaries to the surrounding heathen districts. All this was maintained by the free-will offerings of the native Christians. Where should we find a parish of 3300, in Great Britain, doing anything like so much ? And to crown all, in the year referred to, when the country of *Ijebu* (which had always refused to allow any Christian to enter, or even to pass through it) was thrown open, and the people begged to have Christian teachers sent, and an urgent cabled appeal was sent to the Church Missionary Society in London (then the greatest Protestant missionary society in the world) and the response was a confession of inability to give any help, the Lagos Church Missions supplied the need. A mass missionary meeting was held in Lagos to consider the appeal from Ijebu, and it was decided that the Lagos Church Missions would undertake the work, and at that meeting two native missionaries were appointed and enough money was subscribed to support them for the next three years. The result was, in a few years' time, a spiritual " revival " and mass movement in Ijebu which would compare not unfavourably with the better known one in Uganda.

Many other proofs could be adduced by way of narrative, or statistics, to show how the results in Yoruba-land fully justify Christian Missions to its pagan peoples. The instances given have been selected as showing the psychological effect of spiritual Christianity upon men who had previously been sunk in a debased paganism.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUDING REMARKS

SCIENCE knows no finality. It is, and must ever be, progressive. The scientific student, whether in the physical, mental or religious sphere, must always keep an open mind, and be ready to advance upon his previous knowledge, even though the discovery of fresh facts may involve the renunciation of cherished hypotheses and modification of accepted theories.

In the scientific study of religion, our present state of knowledge is so limited, that, whatever our personal opinions may be, it is hardly wise to dogmatise, and distinctly unwise to ignore, or depreciate, evidence which is not favourable to our own theory.

In connection with the subject of this treatise there arise various questions of considerable, but varying importance, which the writer does not feel called upon to attempt to answer; partly because limitation of space does not allow of adequate discussion, and also because, while eminent writers have dealt with these topics at great length, general agreement seems far from attainment at the present time. The facts of West African belief and practice are here presented, with an indication of the trend of the evidence they furnish. This is compared, to some extent, with similar beliefs in other regions and among other races, in the hope that

their cumulative testimony may be found to be not wholly without value in seeking a solution of the questions which arise.

Is it true that there is "only one Religion," or, are there many?[1] Should the History of Religion be regarded as a distinct study from that of Comparative Religion? What is the truth as to the Origin of Religion? Did man first conceive magic, and from that develop religious ideas? Did he successively pass through the stages of fetichism, totemism, the higher and lower nature-worship, animism, humanism (Euhemerism), and, if so, which came first? Or, was his first religious conception monotheistic? If so, how did this come to him? Was it by a "Divine revelation"? Or has he certain "innate ideas" implanted by his Creator? Are his religious conceptions the simple working out of his mental constitution through "psychological necessity"?[2] As has already been said, we cannot attempt here to answer any one of these questions; but can only briefly review some leading features of our study, in so far as they bear upon them, candidly facing the facts of the case, and indicating some of the parallels in the religious belief of other tribes.

We have seen that the Yorubas recognise four distinct classes of spiritual beings,[3] viz.:

(1) A Supreme Being, infinitely good, and unique.
(2) A multitude of lesser deities, called *orishas*.
(3) The spirits of the dead. (Ancestor-worship, etc.)

[1] Carpenter, J. E., *Comparative Religion*, p. 34; Menzies, *History of Religion*, p. 4 *seq.*

[2] Menzies, *op. cit.* p. 26 *seq.*; Brinton, *Religion of Primitive Peoples*, pp. 8, 9, 142, 214 *seqq.*

[3] This classification is the writer's own, but has been submitted to, and repeatedly endorsed by, natives.

(4) An evil spirit, who takes precedence of all those in Class 2, and who inspired the leading orisha, *Ifa*.

Scientifically, these four classes fall into two divisions: Classes 2, 3, and 4 comprise a full system of Polydæmonism, or "Animism," not in Dr. Tylor's narrower sense of the word, but in its widest application. The Supreme Being of Class 1 is entirely left out of the Yoruba Animistic system, from which the belief in Him is quite distinct, and to which it is clearly anterior. It is plainly the remnant of an ancient Monotheism.[1] The evidence shows that:

(1) There is a vast difference between the highest orisha and the Supreme Deity. If the latter is a development of Animism, why is there no trace of any connection?

(2) The Supreme Being is not worshipped, but left in the background. How is this to be reconciled with the opinion that belief in Him is a development of the lower faith? The opposite result should be found.

(3) The belief in the Supreme Being is most jealously kept and guarded by the oldest and highest of the heathen priests, men who have never come under any Christian influence. There is no support for the suggestion of those who propose that the conception of a Supreme Deity is due to the influence of Mohammedanism or of European Christianity. This point of evidence is strongly supported by the ancient Yoruba lyric poem, *Odu Ofunsa*,

[1] Some might prefer to put Classes 1 and 4 into the second division, substituting Dualism for Monotheism, as in the Zoroastrian system. Colonel Ellis suggests that Yoruba religion began with nature-worship, and developed a Dualism in which Obatala (or perhaps Ifa) was opposed by Eshu. But the writer maintains that the "Devil" (*i.e.* Eshu, who inspired Ifa) belongs rather to the Animistic system. This is shown in the devil-worship of the hill tribes of India, and of the Battaks of the Indian Archipelago (Warneck, *Living Forces of the Gospel*, p. 117).

of which a translation is given in full in Appendix A, and which is of great importance.

Similar evidence comes from other parts of Africa, from India, the Indian Archipelago and from Central Australia, of which specimens are now produced.

Mrs. Talbot writes of the tribes of the Lower Niger :

" It is indisputable that the Ibibios occupy a low rung on the ladder of culture. . . . Yet, to our minds at least, it would appear that their present condition is due to a gradual descent from a very different state of things. Fragments of legend and half-forgotten ritual still survive to tell of times shrouded in the mists of antiquity, when the despised Ibibio of to-day was a different being, dwelling not amid the fog and swamp of fetishism, but upon the sunlit heights of a religious culture hardly less highly evolved perhaps than that of Ancient Egypt." [1]

The Rev. E. Hayward, of the Central Sudan, says :

" The idea of the existence of a God is very vague in the land of the Maghavul. They say that *Nan* . . . made the earth and sky ; but that after he had made it, He left it and went very far away, so far indeed that He has never been seen or heard of since. The place to which He went is *Deng-Nan*, or *Ting-Nan*, literally, the place above which belongs to God." [2]

Dr. R. H. Nassau, whose position as an expert scientist as well as a theologian makes his testimony specially weighty, after over forty years' experience among the tribes of the Ogowe and Gaboon regions, states his view as follows :

" I see nothing to justify the theory of Menzies, that primitive man, or the untutored African of to-day, in worshipping a tree, a snake, or an idol, originally wor-

[1] Talbot, Mrs. Amaury, *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People*, p. 4.
[2] *Round about Panyam*, p. 20.

shipped those very objects themselves, and that the suggestion that they represented, or were even the dwelling-place of, some spiritual Being is an afterthought, up to which he has grown in the lapse of the ages. The rather I see every reason to believe that the thought of the Being, or Beings, as an object of worship, has come down by tradition, and by direct revelation from Jehovah Himself." [1]

Herr Warneck, writing of the Battaks of the Indian Archipelago, assumes that "there is in the popular consciousness the remains of a purer idea of God, alongside and above the recognition of a plurality of gods, a view also that cannot be derived from those. Belief in God had been reduced by nature-worship, fear of spirits and moral coarseness, to a state in which it was no longer recognisable. The host of spirits, born of fear, thrust themselves between God and man, and left behind that faded image of God, which still throws a faint shadow on the feelings of the people . . . The idea of God is dimly preserved: the worship of God is almost entirely lost." Again, he writes:

"The animistic heathen are, in point of fact, ἄθεοι, without God, not in the sense of the fool who says there is no God, not even in the sense of the evil-doer, who, to sin undisturbed, has, against the witness of his conscience, burned the thought of God out of his soul. They have lost God and are ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ (Eph. iv. 18). Between them and Him there has grown up a thick primeval forest, through which they can no longer find their way, and which they have no power to root up." [2]

Even Dr. Estlin Carpenter, while writing strongly on the

[1] *Fetichism in West Africa*, p. 48.
[2] *Living Forces of the Gospel*, p. 35 *seq.* [3] *Op. cit.* p. 108.

side of evolution, admits that "isolated groups, such as the Australians, the Todas of India, or the Veddas of Ceylon, seem to be in the last stages of stagnation or decay." [1]

Dr. Menzies writes: "The bushmen of Australia, the Andaman Islanders, and others, are found to be in such a state in points of habits and acquirements that they must be considered as races which have fallen from a higher position, and present instances of degeneration." [2] He says, again, Religion and civilisation go hand in hand, and if civilisation can decay (and leading anthropologists declare that the debased tribes of Australia and West Africa show signs of a higher civilisation they have lost) then religion may also decay. . . . The races among whom fetichism is found exhibit a well-known feature of the decadence of religion, namely, that the great god or gods have grown weak and faint, and smaller gods and spirits have crowded in to fill up the blank thus caused. Worship is transferred from the great beings, who are the original gods of the tribe and whom it still professes in a vague way to believe, to numerous smaller beings, and from the good gods to the bad." [3]

Dr. Andrew Lang, in his work, *The Making of Religion*, strongly maintains "the conception of a Supreme, or practically Supreme, Being, from the lowest stages of human culture up to Christianity" and complains that "Anthropology has taken for granted that the Supreme Deities of savages have been envisaged by them as 'spirits.' This (he says), paradoxical as the statement may appear, is just what does not seem to be proved, as we shall show." [4] He also says, "Nothing can be less scientific than to snatch up any traveller's tale which makes for our theory, and to ignore evidence, perhaps

[1] *Comparative Religion*, p. 33.
[2] *History of Religion*, p. 20.
[3] *Op. cit.* p. 38.
[4] *Op. cit.* p. 48.

earlier, or later, or better observed, which makes against it." He points to Huxley and Spencer as failing in this respect.[1] Dr. F. B. Jevons bears similar testimony.[2]

We have found strong evidence among the Yorubas of a primitive monotheistic belief, of which there are at least traces, more or less distinct, among other races whose religion is animistic. We find also a remarkable similarity in other matters of belief and practice. The Yoruba *ogun* ("medicine") corresponds to the Melanesian *mana*, and the Iroquois *orenda*. In the practice of sympathetic magic, the Yoruba *apeta* has been shown in an earlier chapter to be closely similar to the *Arungquiltha* of the Australian blacks and the black magic of the Matabele of South Africa. Sir J. G. Frazer, in his monumental work, *The Golden Bough*, tells us of similar practices in India and Ceylon, among the Moslems of North Africa, in ancient Egypt and Babylon, and even in the Scottish Highlands in the present day.[3] Another parallel is found in the use of the "bull-roarer" (the Yoruba Oro-stick) in various lands, even those so distant from Africa as Australia and North-West America. The only other religious practice we need here refer to as being likewise found in other countries where animism prevails is that of human sacrifice.

How are we to account for the remarkable similarity of religious belief among animistic peoples so far separated as those named above? Dr. Brinton truly says that "the earliest and simplest religions of the world deal with nearly the same objective facts in nearly the same subjective fashion, the differences being due to local and temporal causes."[4] Dr. Menzies has stated that

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 46.
[2] *Introduction to the History of Religion*, 8th edn., pp. 386–395.
[3] *Op. cit. The Magic Art*, Vol. I. pp. 57, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69.
[4] *Religions of Primitive Peoples.*

"The theory that man was originally civilised and humane, and that it was by a fall, by a degeneration from that earliest condition, that the state of savagery made its appearance, is now generally abandoned." [1] Dr. Estlin Carpenter says of "the modern conception of evolution" that "it is on this great idea that the whole study of the history of religion is now firmly established. At the foundation of all endeavours to classify the multitudinous facts which it embraces, lies the conviction that whatever may be the occasional instances of degeneration or decline, the general movement of human things advances from the cruder and less complex to the more refined and developed." [2]

Now it is a remarkable fact that, while the majority of those who have written on the general subject of the History of Religion have accepted the evolutionary hypothesis, it is equally true that those who, as missionaries, have spent the greater part of their lives in closest intimacy with the heathen have almost invariably taken the opposite view. Dr. Nassau, after over forty years' experience, a doctor of medicine as well as of divinity, states his opinion in these words: "As to the source of theological knowledge, all our other knowledge is evolved, systematised and developed by patient experiment and investigation. The results of any particular branch of knowledge are cumulative and are enlarged and perfected from generation to generation. But the source of our knowledge of God is not in us, any more than our spiritual life had its source in ourselves. It came *ab extra*. God breathed into the earthly form of Adam the breath of life, and he became a living creature essentially and radically different from the beasts over which he was given dominion. Knowledge of God was thus an original,

[1] *History of Religion*, p. 19 *seq.* [2] *Comparative Religion*, p. 33.

donated, component part of us. . . . To account for the religious nature in man by evolution I regard as a thing that cannot be done. . . . Immortality cannot be evolved out of mortality." [1] Herr Warneck writes: "I have worked as a missionary for many years in intimate contact with thousands of the adherents of animistic heathenism, and I have been convinced that the determining force of that heathenism is hostile to God. . . . The attitude of heathenism towards the Christian religion, always hostile, suggests that it divines an enemy, not a superior brother." [2] Dr. W. St. Clair Tisdall, who is not only a missionary of many years' experience in India and Persia, but also an Oriental scholar of high standing, writes: "If Christianity is not a Divine Revelation, but merely a development of earlier and purely human religious systems, as Dr. Frazer, Herbert Spencer, Dr. Tylor, and perhaps the majority of modern writers on Comparative Religion more or less openly assert, how is it that, while all religions except the Christian (and, as already pointed out, its preliminary stage, Judaism) consecrated the most abominable vices, Christianity from the very first opposed them? Why was not Christianity accepted and welcomed throughout the Roman Empire, as were such faiths as those of Cybele, Isis, and Mithra, for example? If the origin of all religions is one and the same, how was it that the most enlightened men—an Antoninus, a Seneca, a Pliny—as well as the most ignorant and abandoned of idol-worshippers, bitterly opposed the Christian faith, and that faith alone, too often persecuting its professors to the death, while welcoming all other varieties of religion?" [3]

[1] *Fetichism in West Africa*, pp. 28, 30.
[2] *The Living Forces of the Gospel*, pp. 10, 11.
[3] *Comparative Religion*, pp. 68, 69.

Now the testimony and opinion of men of the standing and experience of the three last quoted are not to be lightly brushed aside by such bald assertions as those contained in the two extracts which immediately precede them. Dr. Menzies is not correct in saying that the "theory" which they still uphold is "generally abandoned." Dr. Carpenter's words appear to be nothing less than a frank admission that he, and those who side with him are unable to form an impartial judgment on the great question at issue, since they come to their study not with a mere bias in favour of one side, but with a settled "conviction"! Neither science nor religion has anything to fear from a candid and earnest inquiry and search for truth, but no advance in true knowledge can be made by "begging the question" at the outset. This is very different from assuming a "working hypothesis" which we are prepared to discard, when our discoveries show that it is incorrect.

The writer is of opinion that until the religion of the various heathen tribes has been more intelligently studied at first hand by those living among them, and speaking their languages, and the evidence fairly and impartially weighed, the evolutionary theory of the Origin of Religion should be regarded as an hypothesis which still remains to be effectually established.

APPENDIX A

AN ANCIENT YORUBA RELIGIOUS HYMN

IN the second volume of the *Nigerian Chronicle*, No. 21, dated April 8, 1910, there is given by the learned and painstaking writer, "Adesola" (who is now revealed as the Rev. E. T. Johnson, a Yoruba clergyman), a translation of a remarkable and very ancient lyric. It is really a religious poem on the Fall and Redemption of Man. Mr. Johnson gives it as chanted by an old Ifa priest. He tells us that it is "about the oldest of the religious poems of the Yoruba people," and says that "from internal evidence, the composition dated several centuries before the Birth of Christ. . . ." "The facts therein related point to remoter ages, and it is regarded as the Yoruba version of the story of the Garden of Eden, Man's Fall, and his Redemption." He says also (apparently on the authority of the old priest, as well as the internal evidence of the poem): "Their religion was monotheism. Throughout the whole *Odu* there is no trace of fetich-worship. In times of disaster they consult the will of God by some oracular means. . . . The *Ife* here spoken of is not the modern Ife." This should be carefully noted. The site of the ancient *Ife* is quite unknown. A full copy of the translation is now given:

ODU OFUNSA.

Translated and arranged under headlines by "Adesola."

SCENE I. The Divination Room.

(*Enter Elders from the different federated states of Ife-land, to ascertain cause of national calamity.*)

ORACULAR RESPONSE.

"If the globe be unhinged from its orbit,
And the solid earth from pole to pole be rent,
If this orb in our age lose its balance—
'Tis that we have erred from the right."

So the oracle to the suppliants declared,
Who have come from the Federated States,
The Will of God to know,
When Ife-land lost her first estate.

SCENE II. Poet-priest depicting events in the Assembly Hall.
(*Priest from the State summoned by the Elders to offer sacrifice to propitiate divine wrath.*)

OLOLA from the city *Ado* they summoned,
To restore Ife to her lost estate:
He came (a mighty priest),
He tried, but failed to achieve it.
To the city *Owo*, to ERINKI the priest,
The invitation was next extended,
To restore Ife to her lost estate:
He came (a mightier priest),
He tried, but failed to achieve it.

Though Ado is wise Ifa's abode,
And Owo the seat of sapient Elu,
Yet the wisdom of these sages failed them,
Their efforts were quite unavailing.
Post-speed a new-commissioned mandate
To OGUN in the city *Ire*,
To bring him quick to Ife,
To help restore her estate.
He came (a mighty priest),
He tried, but failed to achieve it.

STATE OF THE COUNTRY.

Men famish for lack of bread,
No crop,
No rain, there was,
A bitter wail from man and beasts—
"Who will restore Ife to her lost estate?"
Loud spoke a voice and said,
"You have not consulted with OBALUFON of *Iyinde*,
And LABERINJO of *Ido*:
With JIGURE of *Otunmoba* and
ESEGBA the high priest of the Egbas,
Who was the first to lead men to the confines of Egba-land:
With ASADA the priest of *Ijesha*,
AKODA of *Ife*, and ASEDA,
The great high priest of all in Ife-land:
They came; they tried:
But all their efforts were unavailing."

Translation of Verse 2.

DIVINATION BY AUGURIES ATTEMPTED.

A pigeon, a symbol of the genius of ESELU
A snail for its adjusting powers from APAKO—
These creatures were divined (by priests) to the suppliants,
Who have come from the Federated States
The Will of God to know;
But these emblems have utterly failed
The Will of God to disclose.

MORE SAGES SUMMONED.

And now they send for OLUMO
The Priest of Imori at *Ijesha*,
And OGUN the priest of the land of *Alara*,
Near neighbours of the Hill tribe of *Ijero*;
For ODUDUGBUNDU of *Esemawe*,
And OBOLE the eponymous war-lord of the *Ketus*.
These men, too, have failed
To restore Ife to her lost estate.

And now they had to send to AKONILOGBON.[1]
And sought an approach to AFONAHANI.[2]
That they help to restore Ife to her lost estate.

These sages came and advised that
OLOTO ENIA,[3] who resides in the land of *Arufin*,[4]
Be summoned to trumpet the Alajogun,[5]
That he may invoke the Olofin,[6]
My lord the Alajaiye, and also
To invoke my lord the Alajorun,
As well as my lord, the Agirilogbon,
The child born on the hill Itase,
Whence the day begins to dawn,
For he alone can restore Ife to her lost estate.

(*The Trumpet sounds.*)

"Why call you me to your world?"
OLOTO ENIA came and spoke.

[1] The man who teaches wisdom.
[2] The one who shows the way.
[3] The Perfect Man.
[4] The transgressors of the law.
[5] The Great Captain.
[6] The Lord of the Palace (or the Law-giver.—S. S. F.).

The reply came forth, " We have called you,
Thou ' Perfect Man,'
That you may trumpet to the *Alajogun*,
And he to the *Olu*.'[1]
Oloto Enia refused : ' I shall not blow ' :
' Why not blow ? ' said they,
' Does not the Squirrel trump for the Boa ? '
' I shall not blow,' said he :
' Does not the Toad trump for the Viper ? '
And again he replied, ' I shall not blow.'
' Does not the Woodcock trump for Neptune ? '
And the *Aluko* [2] for the Mermaids ?
The *Oloburo* alone can carol to the man of heaven,
And you, the ' Perfect Man ' alone, can
And wert ever wont to blow to the *Alajogun*."

(*The Trumpet sounds, and the Celestial Beings, Ajalaiye, the Great Aja, Whirlwind or Spirit, in the earth, Ajalorun, the Great Aja, Whirlwind or Spirit in the heavens, and Agirilogbon, the Man of Perfect Wisdom, descend.*)

A General Exodus of Man and Beast from Ife.

At the sound of the trump of the " Perfect Man,"
A great commotion arose in the earth.
Elephants rushed to their homes in the woods :
The buffaloes betook themselves to the wilds :
The winged fowls to their kingdom ;
The reptiles to their homes :
The great giants to their regions by the sea.
Dogs to the dog-land,
Sheep to the sheep-land :
The brute creation to their respective haunts :
Each race of man to his respective claim.
That was the day of great confusion,
When men and beasts dispersed,
And all great birds betook themselves to flight,
And our belongings got scattered here and there.
" This is parting for ever," said my father,
" Yes, for ever," said I :
" Is it a question of breaches ? "
" Yes, of breaches," said I.
A breach here and a breach there,
Which oft disturb the lunar months.

[1] Head, or Chieftain. [2] Cock.

THE DIVINE BEINGS IN COUNCIL.

From my lord the *Olofin Ajalaiye*,
From my lord the *Olofin Ajalorun*,
From my lord the "Man of Perfect Wisdom,"
A child born on the hill Itase
Whence the day begins to dawn,
Came the Oracular response,
"To bring back peace to Ife and restore her to her lost estate,
You needs must have *Ewe Alasuwalu*,
(Man's character-remodelling leaf)
Go, fetch the leaf at once,
Ere peace to the world be restored."

(*Mankind went in search of the leaf from different parts, and brought what appeared to them to be it.*)

"Lo, here is one, my Lord," they said:
"This cannot be," the "Man of Perfect Wisdom" replied:
"And here is another, my Lord," quoth they:
"This, too, cannot be," was the quick reply.
Again said the "Man of Perfect Wisdom,"
"Why do you mortals not confess to your filth and nakedness?
And I purify and clothe you?"

THE CONFESSION.

They all replied: "We,
O Lord, to our filth and nakedness confess:
Do Thou purify and clothe us."

THE MAN OF PERFECT WISDOM PRODUCED THE LEAF.

So he dipped his hand into the bag of mystery,
And brought out the healing leaf.
There was universal joy and merriment:
Men sang aloud and danced,
"We have received the healing balm,
Oh, Heavenly Prince, re-model us as Thou wilt,
We have received the healing leaf,
Thou Heavenly Prince, re-model our lives as Thou wilt."

"On that day it was that the rain fell, and the World of Ife was restored to her lost estate."

APPENDIX B

EXCURSUS. THE ORIGIN OF THE YORUBA TRIBES

ATTENTION may be called to certain facts which have come to light in the course of our study and to the value of their cumulative testimony, although the value of that testimony may be very differently regarded by various observers. It is, however, obvious that any light we can obtain on the history of a people is of value in tracing the origin of their religion, and if certain features in their religion throw light on their origin the use of this evidence is not necessarily "arguing in a circle."

TRADITIONS.—It has been pointed out (in Ch. I.) that the bulk of traditional testimony among the Yorubas is in favour of their having migrated from the north-east. Similar traditions prevail among the Tshi-speaking peoples of the Gold Coast (Colonel Ellis), and also among the Bantu races of the Gaboon and Congo regions.

MYTHS.—(1) *Flood-myths.* There are several versions of a Deluge, in which one man is always prominent, also a bird, and a tree. The writer heard these when living in the country. They are also alluded to, or quoted, by Colonel Ellis [1] and by Mr. Dennett.[2] Some of these describe the visitation (as in Genesis) as one in which "the rain was upon the earth," others, as being due to the anger of *Olokun*, the sea-god, who caused the sea to arise and flood the land (as Genesis again), *i.e.* "the fountains of the great deep were broken up." (2) *Ifa-myth.* The Ifa-myth (recorded in Ch. IV.) has remarkable resemblances to the story of the Fall in Genesis, Ch. III. The object in view was to obtain knowledge, this knowledge was supplied through *Eshu*, or *Elegba* (Satan), it was given through a woman who received the nuts or fruit from a tree.

[1] *Yoruba-speaking Peoples*, p. 64. [2] *Nigerian Studies*, p. 114.

(3) *Obatala-myth.* With the possible exception of Ifa, Obatala is highest and best of the orishas, and he was associated with Olorun in the work of creation. He is sometimes even spoken of as *Omo-Olorun, i.e.* "Son of God." He is entirely a good and beneficent deity. (It is true that some of the myths give a lower view of him, but myths handed down solely by oral tradition always vary greatly.) His work in creation may be compared with the Hebrew conception of the agency of the Word (*Memra*) of God, the Divine *Logos*, the Lord Christ in the work of creation (Prov. viii. 27–31; St. John i. 3; Heb. i. 2). The story of his voluntary ascension into heaven (Ch. IV.) may be connected with that of Enoch.

Customs and Idioms of the Yorubas.—Some of the customs and idioms of these people are similar to those of the Semitic race, as exemplified in the primitive and patriarchal times of the Hebrews; *e.g.* the position of heads of families, customs of social life, the right of any wayfarer to satisfy his immediate hunger by plucking the produce of his neighbour's farm, but not to take anything away (Deut. xxiii. 24, 25), the idiom expressing intensity or emphasis, "dying thou shalt die" (Gen. ii. 17), etc.

Sacrifices of the Yorubas.—These have many close parallels with those of the Hebrews, as has been indicated in Ch. VIII. Some, like the burnt-offering of the Levitical code, are entirely consumed by fire, and the ashes collected and taken out on to a public road, with which we may compare the "clean place" of the Hebrews. In other cases "the blood of a sacrificial victim is "sprinkled first upon the right lintel, which is sacred to the *Alaba*, and then upon the left lintel, which is sacred to the *Alase*, and after this upon the surface of the door hanging upon one of them" (Bishop J. Johnson). The similarity of this to the ritual of the Jewish Passover is patent. In the sacrifice offered (only occasionally) to *Ipori*, it has been noted that blood and oil are applied to the worshipper's great toe. This accords with the consecration of the Hebrew priest and of the leper who was cleansed, under the Mosaic code (Lev. viii. 23, 24, and xiv. 14, 17). It has also been shown (in Ch. VIII.) that there are similar ritual practices to those of the "scape-goat" and the "heave-offering" of the Hebrews.

These various resemblances to Hebrew religious customs

and legislation, particularly when taken in conjunction with the native tradition of immigration from the east, or north-east, have considerable cumulative force. While they do not necessarily imply any trace of Semitic descent, they would seem to indicate that the Semitic Hebrews and the Negritic Yorubas belong to branches which at some early stage were united to a common stem, and whether this is so or not it is very possible, if not probable, that Hebrew and early Christian influence have many centuries ago been brought down through the Sudan, but the traces of Christian influence which may be found are too faint and too degenerate to have been introduced by European voyagers to the West Coast.

* * * * *

Since writing the above Excursus, the writer has found in the late Rev. J. L. Wilson's book, *Western Africa*, which has already been several times quoted from, the following passage:

"Mixed up with these pagan notions and customs, there are many obvious traces of Judaism, both in Northern and Southern Guinea; and in the latter some undoubted traces of a corrupted form of Christianity, which have probably travelled across the continent from ancient Ethiopia, where Christianity was once firmly established." He instances also "bloody sacrifices, with the sprinkling of blood upon their altars and door-posts, the formal and ceremonial observance of new moons, etc." [1]

[1] *Op. cit.* pp. 220, 221.

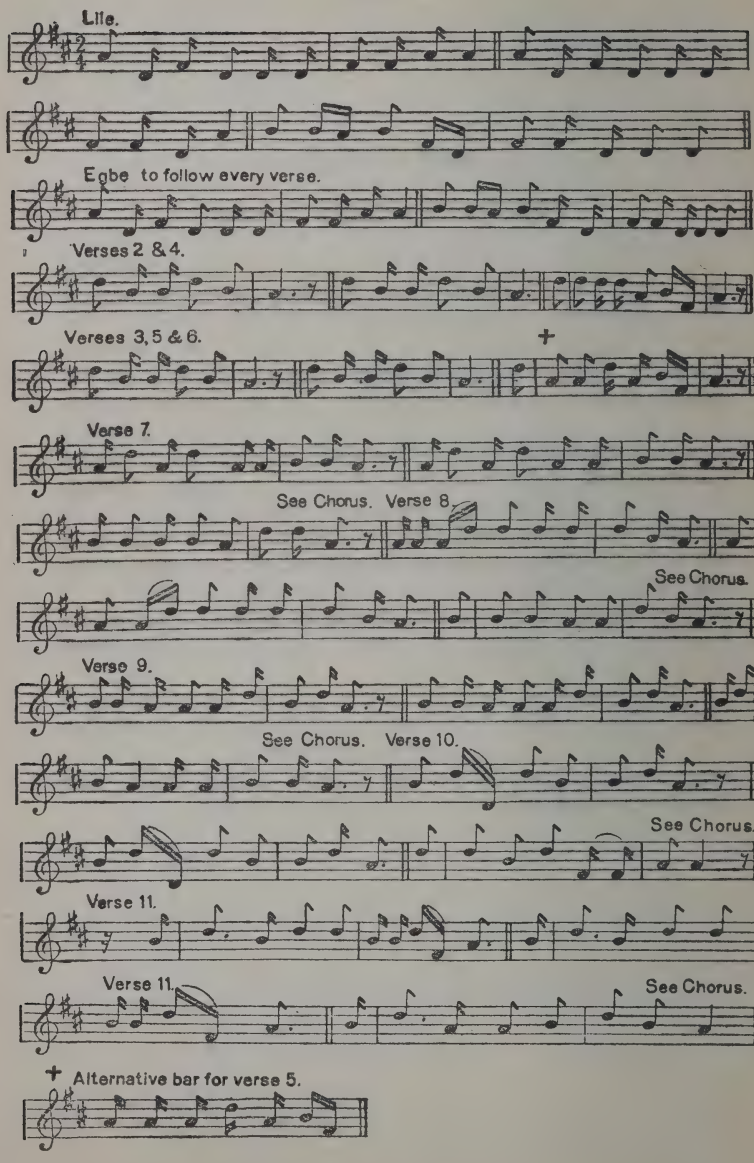
APPENDIX C

YORUBA CHRISTIAN LYRICS

PRIOR to the year 1890 many standard Christian hymns had been translated into Yoruba, set to their recognised tunes, and used in the church services. But these were all of European cast and could only be understood by Africans who had been taught to do so. To the heathen they were incomprehensible. It was felt that something of a purely African type was needed, which would appeal at once to the Yoruba who had not been in any degree Europeanised, and in the year referred to, mainly through the work of Mr. (now the Rev.) J. J. Ransome-Kuti, a great advance was made, and several Christian lyrics written in the style of African songs and chants and set to purely native airs were produced. The first two or three of these were sung at the opening of a new church at Igbore in Abeokuta, including "K'a foribale f' Olorun" and "E je k'a jumo sise o," which are given below.

The number of these lyrics has greatly increased and a small volume containing fifty-seven of them, with music, has been published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge as an Appendix to the Yoruba Hymn Book. The specimens which follow are taken from this book.

ORIN 4.


Lile.
Egbe to follow every verse.
Verses 2 & 4.
Verses 3, 5 & 6.
Verse 7.
See Chorus. Verse 8.
See Chorus.
Verse 9.
See Chorus. Verse 10.
See Chorus.
Verse 11.
Verse 11.
See Chorus.
+ Alternative bar for verse 5.

Apa Kini.

1 *Lile.* Jesu Olugbala mo f'ori fun:
Jesu Olugbala mo f'ọkan fun.
A ! ki nma ba kugbe ẹ járe.
Egbe. Jesu Olugbala mo f'ori fun,
À ki nma bā kugbe ẹ jare.

2 *Lile.* O ṣeun fun mi pọ !
O ṣeun fun mi pọ !
O w' aiye nitori mi.
Egbe.—Jesu Olugbala, &c.

3 *Lile.* O ṣeun fun mi pọ !
O ṣeun fun mi pọ !
O jiya nitori mi.
Egbe.—Jesu Olugbala, &c.

4 *Lile.* O ṣeun fun mi pọ !
O ṣeun fun mi pọ !
O ku nitori mi.
Egbe.—Jesu Olugbala, &c.

5 *Lile.* O ṣeun fun mi pọ !
O ṣeun fun mi pọ !
O ṣ' ètùtù nitori mi.
Egbe.—Jesu Olugbala, &c.

6 *Lile.* O ṣeun fun mi pọ !
O ṣeun fun mi pọ !
O mbẹbẹ nitori mi.
Egbe.—Jesu Olugbala, &c.

Apa Keji.

7 *Lile.* Ṣango Ṣango ko le gba ni là:
Ṣango Ṣango ko le gba ni là:
Ọya Ọya ko ni pa o.
Egbe.—Jesu Olugbala, &c.

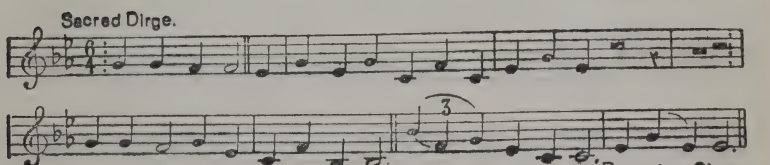
8 *Lile.* Orișa nla kọ l'o da wa o :
Orișa nla kọ l'o da wa o :
Yemaja kò lè bimọ o.
Egbe.—Jesu Olugbala, &c.

9 *Lile.* Gbogbo orișa l'o diti o.
Gbogbo orișa l'o diti o.
Irunmalẹ̀ ko le gba ni là.
Egbe.—Jesu Olugbala, &c.

10 *Lile.* Ọlọrun ṣeun tan o.
Ọlọrun ṣeun tan o.
O dá ni, O si gba ni.
Egbe.—Jesu Olugbala, &c.

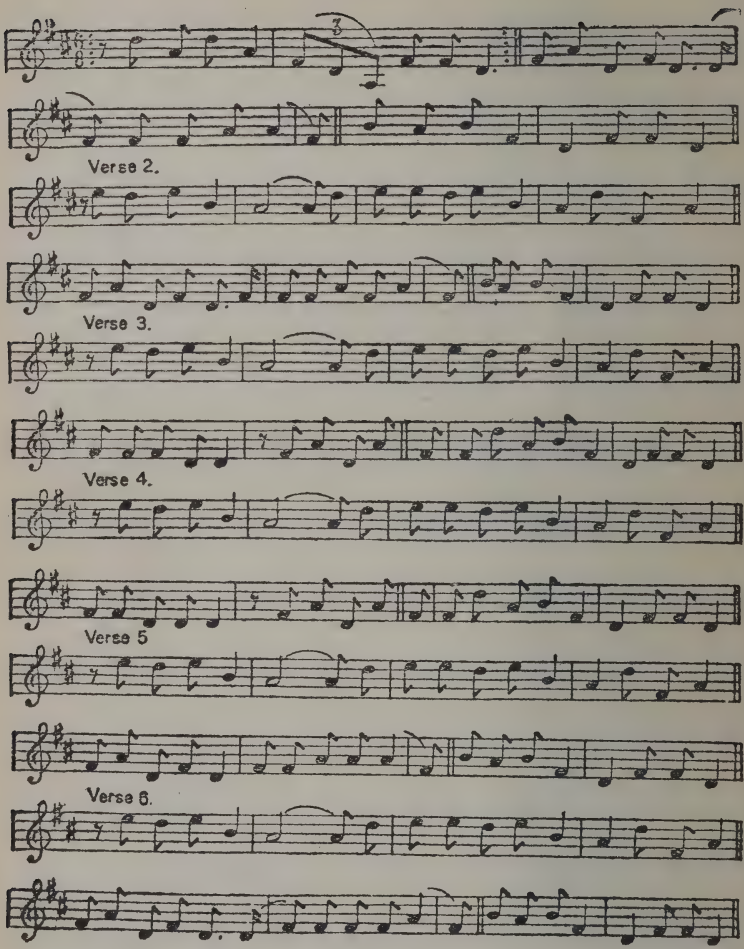
11 *Lile.* Ẹ wa, ẹ jẹ k'a sin Ọlọrun :
Ẹ wa, ẹ jẹ k'a sin Ọlọrun :
Ẹ kó orișa nyin danu.
Egbe.—Jesu Olugbala, &c.

ORIN 5.



K'a mura o.
Egbẹ onigbagbọ o, k'a mura,
K'a mura o.
Egbẹ onigbagbọ o, k'a mura,
K'a mura, k'a le pade l'oke,
K'a mura, oke n' ile wa.

ORIN 6.



1 K'a f' oribalẹ f' Ọlọrun,
K'a f' oribalẹ f' Ọlọrun,
Olodumare on l' Ọba mimọ,
K'a f' oribalẹ f' Ọlọrun.

2 K'a f' oribalẹ, Ẹ jẹ k'a f' oribalẹ
f' Ọlọrun,
Olodumare l' Ọba aiyeraiye,
K'a f' oribalẹ f' Ọlọrun.

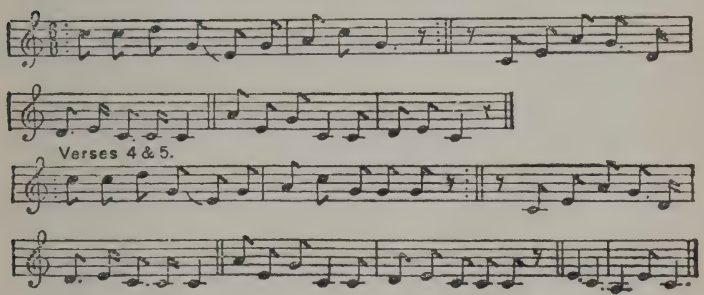
3 K'a f' oribalẹ, Ẹ jẹ k'a f' oribalẹ
f' Ọlọrun,
A bọ 'gi bọ̀ 'pẹ, ẹ wa gbagbọ,
Ẹ wa k'a f' oribalẹ f' Ọlọrun.

4 K'a f' oribalẹ, Ẹ jẹ k'a f' oribalẹ
f' Ọlọrun,
Gbogbo ijoye, ẹ wa gbagbọ,
Ẹ wa k'a f' oribalẹ f' Ọlọrun.

5 K'a f' oribalẹ, Ẹ jẹ k'a f' oribalẹ f' Ọlọrun :
Olodumare l' Ọba t'Ọ daiye,
K'a f' oribalẹ f' Ọlọrun.

6 K'a f' oribalẹ, Ẹ jẹ k'a f' oribalẹ f' Ọlọrun,
Olodumare on l' Ọba aiye,
K'a f' oribalẹ f' Ọlọrun.

ORIN 7.



1 Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ ṣiṣẹ o,
Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ ṣiṣẹ o,
Ọna rere l' ọna Olugbala,
Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ ṣiṣẹ o.

2 Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ wãsu o,
Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ wãsu o,
Ọna titọ l' ọna Olugbala,
Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ wãsu o.

3 Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ wãsu o,
Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ wãsu o,
Ọna 'titọ l' ọna Olugbala ;
Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ wãsu o.

4 Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ ṣiṣẹ Baba wa ;
Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ ṣiṣẹ Baba wa ;
Ọna pipe l' ọna Olugbala ;
Ẹ jẹ k'a jumọ ṣiṣẹ Baba wa.

5 B'a wa ba jumọ ṣiṣẹ Baba wa,
B'a wa ba jumọ ṣiṣẹ Baba wa,
Igba'ba de ọ̀dọ̀ Olugbala ;
Awa o jumọ gb'ade Baba wa.
Aṣẹ. Amin o.

(*Translation of Yoruba Christian Lyrics.*)

JESU OLUGBALA MO F'ORI FUN.

This hymn is based on the Yoruba saying, "I give my head to ——," indicating the particular deity worshipped by the speaker.

First Part.

1 *Verse.* Jesus the Saviour I give my head to (*twice*).
Oh! let me not perish, I pray,
Chorus. (*Repeat as above, after each verse.*)
2 *Verse.* He was very kind to me (*twice*).
He came to earth for my sake.
3 *Verse.* (*3rd line*) He suffered for my sake.
4 *Verse.* (*3rd line*) He died for my sake.
5 *Verse.* (*3rd line*) He made propitiation for me.
6 *Verse.* (*3rd line*) He is interceding for me.

Second Part.

7 *Verse.* Shango, Shango cannot save us (*twice*).
Oya, Oya has no power.
8 *Verse.* Obatala (*lit.* Great-orisha) did not create us.
Yemaja cannot give birth.
9 *Verse.* Every orisha is deaf.
Irunmale cannot save us.
10 *Verse.* God is ever kind.
He created us and He saves us.
11 *Verse.* Come ye, let us serve God; (*twice*)
Cast ye away your idols (*lit.* orishas).

K'A MURA O.

Let us be ready.
Oh, church of believers, let us be ready,
Let us be ready.
Oh, church of believers, let us be ready,
Let us be ready, let us meet above,
Let us be ready, our home is above.

K'A F'ORIBALE F'OLORUN.

1 Let us bow down to God (*twice*).
The Almighty is a holy King,
Let us bow down to God.

2 Let us bow down, Let us bow down to God,
The Almighty is an everlasting King,
Let us bow down to God.
3 (*2nd line*) Ye worshippers of wood and palm-nuts, come and believe, etc.
4 (*2nd line*) All ye chiefs, come and believe, etc.
5 (*2nd line*) The Almighty is the King who created the world, etc.
6 (*2nd line*) The Almighty—He is the King of the world.

E JE K'A JUMO SISE O.

1 Let us unite to work (*twice*).
A perfect way is the way of the Saviour.
Let us unite to work.
2 & 3 Let us unite to preach (*twice*).
A way of truth is the Saviour's way, etc.
4 Let us unite to do our Father's work, etc.
A perfect way is the Saviour's way, etc.
5 If we unite to do our Father's work, etc.
When we come into the Saviour's presence,
We shall unitedly receive our Father's crown.
Amen, Amen.

INDEX

Abasi-Ibun, 25
Abeokuta, 5, 15, 28, 31, 34, 46, 52, 53, 58, 65, 69, 77, 98, 105, 112
Abiku, 84
Adamu-Orisha, 81
Adesola, 76, 82, 109, 111, 161
Ado, 36, 45
African Society, Journal of, 21
Aganju, 45, 47
Agbe, 70
Agemo, 82, 84
Aiyebiwo, E. S., 3
Aja, 67
Aje, 35
Aje-Shaluga, 46, 61
Ajigbona, 100, 103
Akoko tree, 51
Akoko tribe, 35
Alafin, 18, 115
Alake, 20, 71
Alanu, 28
Alaye, 27
Albinos, 101
Allah, 32
Amulets, 123
Ancestor-worship, 23
Animism, 153
Apeta, 119, 157
Apetebi, 103
Aropale, 81
Arungquiltha, 120, 157
Asare Pawo, 103
Asawo, 103
Ashanti, 8, 21, 24, 26, 114, 130
Augustine, St., 138
Aviro, Alfonso de, 33
Awo, 94
Awujale, 20
Ayan, 17

Babalawo, 23, 37 *seqq.*, 45, 89, 92, 100, 103, 126 *seq.*, 144.
Babalawos, two converted, 148 *seq.*
Badagry, 19
Bageida, 19
Bandicoot, 42
Bantu tribes, 25, 29
Benin peoples, 8, 33, 98
Bibliography, 9 *seqq.*
Birds, 19, 64, 67, 96
Blacksmiths, 51 *seq.*
Bondo, 141
Brinton, Prof. D. G., 12, 25, 157
Buku, 56
Bull-roarer, 69, 157
Burial customs, 106 *seqq.*
Buruku, 86
Buzzard, Turkey-, 19, 96

Calabashes, 45, 49, 54
Cannibalism, 101
Carpenter, Dr. J. Estlin, 155 *seq.*, 158
Celestial bodies, 13
Charms, 123
Chastity, 142
Christianity, advantages of, 146
Churches, Native Christian, 149 *seq.*
Church Missionary Society, 14, 150
Churinga, 15, 70
Codrington, Bishop, 116
Congo, 25
Criminal, execution of, 72
Crocodile, 19, 64, 136
Crocodile Secret Society, 113
Curses, 119
Customs of Yorubas, 167

Dada, 46, 61
Dahomey, 98, 130
Dead, Abode of the, 132
Death customs, 106 *seqq.*

Declé, Monsieur, 120
Defects of paganism, 142 *seq.*
Demons, 144
Dennett, R. E., 1, 8, 14, 24, 29, 35, 56, 68, 71
Devil, 23, 85 *seqq.*
Disease, 125
Divination, 38 *seq.*, 89, 91
Driver, Dr. S. R., 7

Eating the king, 21, 103
Eda, 27
Edun dudu, or Edun oriokun, 59
Efik, 25
Egba government, 36
Egba tribe, 6, 32, 69, 112
Egbo, 82
Egbogi, 117
Egungun, or Egun, 68 *seq.*, 76 *seqq.*, 106, 110
Eje-odun, 67
Eji-ogba, 39 *seq.*
Ekun tribe, 35
Eko-Ifa, 35
Ela, 41
Eleda, 24, 26
Elegbara, or Elegba, 13, 37, 86
Elemi, 27
Ellis, Lieut.-Col., 4, 24, 29, 36, 55, 62, 71, 86, 90
Eluku, 68 *seq.*, 81, 106
Elusu, 63
Eni-duru, 55
Ere, 125
Eru-Oro, 73
Eshu, 22, 29, 30, 37, 85 *seqq.*, 153
Eshu-to-sin, 85
Etutu, 109
Ewe tribe, 29
Ewo, 35, 92, 95

Fadipe, Jacob, 148
Faith, 30, 141
Fan-gbe, 127
Fan tribe, 132
Fear, 29
Fernando Po, 33
Fetich, 12, 25, 116
Fidelity, 142
Filial regard, 141
Flood stories, 7, 166
Folk lore, 7
Frazer, Sir James, 6, 157
Funerals, 107 *seq.*

Ga tribe, 29
Gaboon, 25
Gennep, Van, 121
Ghosts, 68
Gratitude, 30
Grebo country, 26
Groves, 18, 105

Harding, Rev. T., 78
Hayward, Rev. E., 154
Heaven, 133
Hebrews, sacrifices of, 167
Hell, 133
Hinderer, Rev. D., 80
Hospitality, 142
Human sacrifices, 98
Huntin, 16
Hutchinson, F. J., 25, 101
Hyena, 134
Hymn, An ancient Yoruba (Appendix A), 161
Hymns, Christian Yoruba (Appendix C), 169

Ibadan, 7, 46, 58, 65, 80, 105
Ibeji, 58
Idan, 127
Idols, 22, 106
Ifa, 13, 18, 31, 34 *seqq.*, 53
Ife, 7, 18, 20, 36, 38, 45
Igba Irana, 76
Igbeti, 13, 90
Igbodu, 100
Igboro, 105
Ijebu, 82, 150
Ijesha, 84
Ijimere, 19
Ilorin, 13
Images, 86 *seqq.*, 106
Indwelling spirits, 130
Information, on gaining, 2
Innate ideas, 152
Ipade ceremony, 76

Ipin Ijeun, 20, 130
Ipori, 20, 131
Iroko, 4, 17
Iroquois Indians, 117
Isan, 148
Ishe, 70
Israelite sacrifices, 97
Itase, 36
Iya Agbe, 45
Iyaku, 128
Iyerosin, 38

Jaguna, 72
Jakuta, 25, 47, 94
Jevons, Dr. F. B., 157
Johnson, Bishop James, 25, 34, 96, 100, 128, 138
Johnson, Rev. E. T., 161
Jupiter, 48

Kainde, or Kehinde, 58
Keribo, Oyesile, 36
King Edward VII., 20
Kingsley, Miss Mary, 6, 29
Kola-nuts, 43, 95
Kuso, 50

Lagos, 46, 62 *seq.*, 78, 150
Lagos Church Missions, 150
Lang, Dr. Andrew, 2, 23, 24, 27, 69, 156
Language, 2, 4, 8
Legends, 134
Leopard, 18, 134
Leopard Society, 113
Letu, 18
Life and its transmissions, 22
Lishabi, 8, 18
Lokoro, 64
Love, 30
Lower animals, 18
Lustral water, 127
Lying, 2
Lyrics, Yoruba Christian, 94, Appendix C, 169

Macgregor, Sir Wm., 21
Madagascar, 120
Magbas, 50, 104
Magic, 116 *seq.*
Magic, Sympathetic, 119
Man as object of worship, 20
Mana, 116 *seq.*, 157
Marett, Dr. R. R., 121
Mariwo, 105, 112, 118
Marriage bond, 142
Maws, 77
"Medicine," 116 *seqq.*
Mendis, 141
Mentality, African, 29
Menzies, Dr. Allan, 156
Metempsychosis, 133
Mimo, 28
Missions and Missionaries, 24, 33, 78, 105, 145, 147
Modakekes, 46
Mogeje, 72
Mohammedans, 23, 27, 32, 123
Monkey, 19, 134 *seq.*
Mullahs, 123
Musical instruments, 94
Musical intonation, 8, 51
Myths, 36 *seq.*, 43, 45, 48, 166

Nassau, Dr. R. H., 2, 25, 58, 92, 132, 141, 154, 158
Native arts, 7
Necromancy, 128
Niger, River, 58, 90
Nigerian Chronicle, 82, 84, 109, 161
Night egun, 80
Nlado, 72
Nyankupon, 24
Nyonmo, 24
Nyiswa, 26

Oba, 14, 46, 51, 63
Obaba Arugbo, 42
Obalofon, 59, 99
Obatala, 13, 22, 36, 42, 46, 56, 94, 95, 104
Objects of belief, 22 *seqq.*
Objects of worship, 12 *seqq.*
Odu, 36, 38 *seqq.*
Odu fire, 40
Odu Ofunsa, 161

Odudua, 13, 22, 26, 36, 43 *seqq.*, 46, 104
Odushushango, 50
Oduso, 41
Ofefe, 64
Oga-ogo, 26
Ogboni society, 4, 72, 108
Ogowe, 25
Ogun (god), 22, 46, 47, 51 *seq.*, 94
Ogun (medicine), 117
Ogun, River, 14, 46, 47, 93
Okambi, 17
Oke, 46, 60
Okinkin, 17
Oko, 55
Ologbo, 75
Olori, 20, 92, 130
Olori-Merin, 13, 67
Olodumare, 24, 27
Olokun, 46, 62
Olorun, 5, 23 *seqq.*
Olosa, 19, 46, 63
Olubi, Rev. D., 80
Olumide, Rev. J. J., 3
Olumo, 15, 60, 76
Oluwa, 27
Oluwo, 99
Oluwole, Bishop, 25
Omo Olorun, 31
Ondo, 6, 58, 85, 98
Oni, 20
Oniloku, 82
Oni Shango, 50, 104
Opele, 42
Opelifa, 38
Opon Ifa, 38
Oracles, 36, 38, 42
Ordeal, 54
Ore, 35
Orisha, 28 *seqq.*, 34 *seqq.*
Orishabi, 37
Orishala, 42
Orishapopo, 42
Oro, 4, 69, 110 *seqq.*
Oro Ilare, 42
Oro-jegi, or Oro-pagi, 75 *seq.*
Oro-stick, 70, 119
Orun, 13, 133
Orungan, 37, 46 *seq.*
Orunmila, 34, 41
Osanyin, 103
Oshori, 46
Oshosi, 42, 52
Oshu, 13
Oshun, 14, 42, 46, 51, 65
οὐρανός, 26
Ovia, 76
Owl, 126
Oya, 14, 35, 46, 51
Oye, 13
Oyigiyigi, 41
Oyo, 8

Patas monkey, 19
Paul, St., 141, 143
Peregun, 5, 52
Philanthropy, Christian, 147
Pinodu, 13, 40
Pluto, 86
Poisoning, 127
Polo, 54
Polydæmonism, 153
Polygamy, 142
Popo tribe, 35
Porro, 141
Porto Novo, 19
Porto Seguro, 19
Portugal, 14, 33
Prayer, 30, 92, 140
Priestesses, 104
Priesthood, 19, 103 *seq.*
Priests (see also Babalawos), 37, 57
Proverbs, 7, 28, 31, 52, 117, 147
Psychology, 20, 29, 130 *seqq.*
Python Society, 113

Redemption offering, 97
Reptile-worship, 20, 64, 65
Reverence, 29, 141
Rig Veda, 26
Ritual, 94
Rocks, 14 *seq.*, 60
Roman Catholic Mission, 33 *n.*
Russia, 18

Sacrifice, 30, 50, 52, 89, 92, 95 *seqq.*, 139, 167
Sacrifice, human, 35, 62, 98 *seqq.*

Salutations, 30 *seq.*
Sapoba, 63
Satan, 86
Savi, 19
Secret societies, 3, 113
Shadrach, 149
Shango, 13, 24, 35, 46, 47 *seqq.*, 106
Sherbro, 141
Shigidi, 126
Shopono, 4, 46, 56
Shrines, 22, 46 *seq.*, 56, 105
Sierra Leone, 113
Silk-cotton trees, 4, 51
Slavery, 74
Smallpox god, 4, 46, 56
Snakes, 136
Songs and chants, 40, 50; Appendix C, 169
Sopoton, 56
Soul of man, 130 *seqq.*
Soul, External, 131
Spencer and Gillen, 3, 15, 120, 134
Spencer, Herbert, 131
Spiritism, 128
Spirits, indwelling, 130
Spiritual beings, classes of, 152 *seq.*
Supreme Deity, 23, 140, 153
Surf, 62
Sympathetic magic, 119

Taboo, 35, 95
Taiwo, 58
Talbot, Mrs. Amaury, 154
Temples, 64, 105
Tisdall, Dr. W. St. Clair, 159
Tones in language, 3
Totemism, 113 *seq.*
Townsend, Rev. H., 25
Traditions, 7, 166
Transmigration, 127, 133 *seqq.*
Trees, 16, 51 *seq.*, 126
Trial by ordeal, 54 *seq.*
Tribes, 6, 8
Tschwis, or Tshis, 29, 134
Turkey-buzzard, 19, 96
Tutelary gods, 92
Twin-gods, 58 *seq.*
Twins, 21, 101
Tylor, Dr. E. B., 1, 153

Uncanny, 116

Varuna, 26
Vulcan, 48
Vulture, 19, 64, 96

Warneck, Herr, 155
Wars, Intertribal, 74
Week, 94
Wilson, Rev. J. L., 25, 122, 168
Wisdom, 34
Witchcraft, 54, 116 *seqq.*, 125
Witch-doctor (see also Babalawo), 125
Wood, Rev. J. B., 25, 120
Worship, modes of, 93

Yankupon, 26
Yemaja, 42, 45 *seq.*, 48, 94
Yemi, 26
Yoruba country, 6
Yoruba people, 6
Yoruba tribes, 6, 7

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